DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 061 168 SP 005 611

AUTHOR	Sabine, Gordon A.
TITLE	Teachers Tell It-Like It Is, Like It Should Be.
PUB DATE	71
NOTE	144p.
AVAILABLE FROM	The American College Testing Program, P.O. Box 168, Iowa City, Iowa 52240 ($3.00)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*High Schools; *Parent School Relationship; Questionnaires; *Student Teacher Relationship; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Morale

ABSTRACT

This book summarizes and reports on a questionnaire mailed to high school teachers all over the nation during the spring of 1971. Confidential replies were requested to 58 agree-disagree questions and to four open-end questions such as: 1) what really goes on in high schools today; 2) what teachers privately think of their students; 3) what teachers think of the parents of their students; 4) what teachers think of their principals, superintendents, school board members, and legislators; 5) who most misunderstands teachers, and how; and 6) how the teacher would run the school system if they could be superintendent for a year. Replies were received from 85 large and small high schools in every state of the union and represented 44 percent of the 6,111 teaching faculty of these schools. The major content of the book consist of more than 1,200 selected quotations from the open-end questions, divided into two sections--how it is and how it should be. The third section contains the answers to each questionnaire item, and the fourth chapter offers some interpretations and suggestions for teachers, parents, and school management officials. The participating schools are listed. (MBM)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

ED 061168

Teachers Tell It – Like It Is, Like It Should Be

...Teachers tell about
parents, taxpayers, reporters,
legislators, school boards,
superintendents, principals,
students, and others

Teachers Tell It – Like It Is, Like It Should Be

GORDON SABINE *RAPS WITH 2,692 HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS FOR THE AMERICAN COLLEGE TESTING PROGRAM*

. . .Teachers tell about parents, taxpayers, reporters, legislators, school boards, superintendents, principals, students, and others

ACT *SPECIAL REPORT THREE**

*(The first report in this series, *When You Listen, This Is What You Can Hear . . .*, also was by Dr. Sabine. It was based on *Youthpoll*—a questionnaire that elicited responses from 1,603 college-bound youth.)

The American College Testing Program is dedicated to the enrichment of education. It was founded as an inviolate public trust and operates as a nonprofit corporation governed by educational representatives from individual states or regions and a Board of Trustees.

A fundamental goal of The Program is to exercise educational leadership by conducting testing, information gathering, evaluating, and related activities in order to (1) assist in the identification and solution of educational problems and (2) communicate to the general and professional publics knowledge and ideas about education.

The chief beneficiaries of The Program's services are students, secondary schools, institutions of higher education, and educational researchers.

PROCESS WITH PUBLISHER'S PRICE ONLY. NO REPRODUCTION.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 71-178186

©1971 by The American College Testing Program. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America

For additional copies, write: ACT Publications, P.O. Box 168, Iowa City, Iowa 52240
Single copy, $3.00. Discount for quantities and to schools.

Permission to reproduce this copyrighted work has been granted to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and to the organization operating under contract with the Office of Education to reproduce documents included in the ERIC system by means of microfiche only, but this right is not conferred to any users of the microfiche received from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service. Further reproduction of any part requires permission of the copyright owner.

Teachers Tell It . . .

"The father was totally selfish, impulsive, thoughtless, and ignorant. When his daughter was 13, he raped her and gave her a son."

"I find my teaching colleagues afraid, slow to move, unemotional, petty, paranoid, unimaginative, and materialistic."

"Students expect a 'Tonight' show performance with a guaranteed A without making any effort."

"Our legislators ride in Cadillacs or Continentals, raise their own salaries, and berate the peasants (us teachers) for demanding a decent living wage."

"Superintendents tend to be a gutless breed. They protect stupid principals."

"Principals are old men who once were poor teachers, so they went into administration. Now they are poor administrators."

"School board members are usually feeble-minded citizens grasping for public recognition, seeking a scholarship, and trying to avenge some grievance."

The point of this book is very simple:

Teachers need to be heard more. They need to have the chance to express their frustrations and air their anger, and to do so in a way that will get the message beyond the protective custody of officialdom to the audience that really needs to hear it (parents and the general public).

Just about everyone else connected with our schools has the opportunity to speak his piece. Legislators who set national or state policy. School board members who follow with local policy. School administrators, outward via the news media, inward via memos and staff meetings. Taxpayers at the polls. Parents (the few who bother) with feedback to teachers and other groups. Even students, especially as of last spring.

But with whom can the teacher share? To whom can the teacher complain? To other teachers in the faculty lounge?

"Parents expect the teacher to develop in the student in 45 minutes a day what the parent has failed to accomplish in 15 years."

"You could give all A's and not teach a thing, and parents would be satisfied."

"In the service he flies a helicopter, but when he comes home, his father won't trust him with the family car."

"When the boy got in trouble, the parents insisted the judge put him in a reformatory because he was 'no good and never would be.'"

But what good would that really do, when what the teacher wants is to get his opinions and suggestions to the eyes and ears of (and into the thinking of) someone who plays an important role in the success or failure of our schools?

That's why this book was created. It gives a broad range of U.S. high school teachers—2,692 of them—the chance to say what they've long wanted to say to and about parents, principals, superintendents, school board members, legislators, students, taxpayers, and a good many others.

If you're in any one of those groups and you've wondered what teachers really think of you, wonder no longer. They've told it all here.

Teachers Tell It is a summary and report of what happened when The American College Testing Program conducted TEACH-POLL, a mail questionnaire of high school teachers all over the nation. In the spring of 1971, TEACH-POLL asked teachers to respond confidentially to a series of 58 agree-disagree questions and to 4 open-end questions on subjects such as:

- What really goes on in high schools today.
- What they privately think of their students.
- What they think of the parents of those students.
- What they think of their principals, superintendents, school board members, and legislators.
- Who most misunderstands teachers, and how.
- How they would run the school system if by some luck (good or bad) they could be superintendent-for-a-year.

While the TEACH-POLL audience did not in the statistical research sense represent a scientifically selected sample of all the million-plus teachers in U.S. high schools, it did include teachers from 85 different large and small high schools located in large and small cities in every state

"A good teacher is an artist–gifted, intelligent, patient, and willing to work long hours."

"It is the constant giving of oneself to others, every minute of the day, that the taxpayers don't understand."

"To most students, teachers are ogres who compel them to read, write, study, and learn."

"Principals tend to treat teachers the same way they treat students–as children, quite often to be seen but not heard."

---

of the union. Last year, these schools enrolled 128,000 students and employed 6,111 teaching faculty members, 44% of whom responded to our questionnaire. In these schools, faculty size ranged from 6 to 160, student enrollments from 125 to 3,660. Of the responding teachers, 96% taught in public schools, 46% taught in cities of 100,000 or more population, 53% were men, and 74% were married.

The proportion of ethnic minority group enrollment in the schools ranged from zero to 98%, and 28% of the responding teachers taught in schools with a minority enrollment of 10% or more.

Questionnaires were distributed through principals, but teachers responded individually and returned their answers directly to ACT. All teachers in the participating schools were invited to participate. Of the respondents, 26% taught English or foreign languages, 16% social studies, 13% mathematics, 10% science, 5% art, music, or drama, 5% physical education, 7% other courses or a combination of subjects, and 18% vocational courses.

Twenty-nine percent of those responding were under 30 years of age, 30% were from 30 to 45, and 41% were over 45.

Most of the book represents selected quotations, more than 1,200 of them, chosen from the hundreds of thousands of words the teachers wrote in response to the open-end questions about who misunderstands them, about parents, and about how (if they were superintendent) they'd increase public understanding and support of the schools.

The *Like It Is* section is first, and closes with a description of the "worst" parents the teachers ever have

"In front of his son, the father said that cheating is an American way of life."

"He thought he was a model parent because he forced his son to go to church every Sunday and get a haircut."

"She wanted her brain-damaged child to stay in the most demanding academic program. She would lock him in his room at night to study."

"They shared my enthusiasm for a liberal education, education for the joy of it, for furniture for your mind, for playing with your brain."

---

had to deal with. *Like It Should Be* is next, opening with a section on the "best" parents the teachers remember. Answers to each questionnaire item and a list of the participating schools are in Chapter 3, and the book closes with what all this could mean to you.

TEACH-POLL was a logical extension of YOUTHPOLL, the first study I did during a year's leave from Michigan State University as a postdoctoral research fellow in the new ACT Research Institute. TEACH-POLL was started during that year, and concluded after I returned to the MSU faculty.

Teachers Tell It, both interesting and disturbing on its own, becomes all the more moving if you will read it along with the YOUTHPOLL book. *(When You Listen, This Is What You Can Hear. . .,* published by The American College Testing Program, P.O. Box 168, Iowa City, Iowa 52240. Single copy, $3.)

For assistance in TEACH-POLL, I am indebted to the entire ACT organization, particularly President Fred F. Harcleroad. The same team of very special helpers that made YOUTHPOLL possible—Gwendolyn Norrell, David Christ, and Judy Miller—also played a major role in creating and processing TEACH-POLL.

On behalf of all teachers who should be listened to more, *Teachers Tell It* is dedicated to the teacher I listen to most, Doris Hume.

—Gordon A. Sabine
August 24, 1971

WHAT'S TO FOLLOW . . .

---

1. Telling It Like It Is 1
about—
  Parents 2
  Legislators 12
  Nonparent taxpayers 16
  News reporters and broadcasters 20
  School board members .23
  Principals 29
  Superintendents 33
  Students 36
  And others 40
  The "worst" parents 46

2. Telling It Like It Should Be 65
about—
  The "best" parents 65
  Superintendents 76
    Quieting the critics 76
    Serving the public 77
    Telling the truth (for once) 79
    Parents 80
    Students 83
  Teachers 86
  Deadwood, and what to do with it 91
  Financing 93
  Curriculum 96
  Public relations 97
  Minority groups 101
  Athletics 102
  If I became superintendent 102

3. The Questionnaire 111
How they "voted"—
  On teachers and teaching 112
  On teachers as citizens 115
  On the students we teach 117
  On the parents of our students 120
  On the public and our schools 121
  On how the schools should be run 123
  On teacher education .126
  Looking forward (and backward) 127

4. What They Told Us 129

Participating Schools 134

Telling It Like It Is

THE QUESTION WAS:

"In your experience, what one group most misunderstands teachers—legislators, news reporters and broadcasters, parents, nonparent taxpayers, school board members, principals, superintendents—or pick your own."

The teachers named the groups in this order:

23% parents
18% legislators
16% nonparent taxpayers
9% reporters and broadcasters
9% school board members
4% principals
3% superintendents
17% others (including students, counselors, and more)

Once the TEACH-POLL respondent had chosen the group that most misunderstands teachers, the next question was:

"What is it the people in this group misunderstand?"

Here are some of the responses:

Teachers Tell about Parents

1

Many parents do not understand what teaching really is:

"They think that if the body is in the classroom, something is bound to sink in, even by accident."

"Many parents equate learning with quietness and orderliness in a classroom, which is not necessarily true."

"They think that learning is supposed to be difficult and not too pleasant."

"They think that learning goes on only when the student is 'studying'."

"They think their children should learn things, not concepts."

"They don't understand that the crucial factor in education is the relationship between student and teacher on a human level, not a content level."

"They do not seem to understand that there is more to teaching than giving out information and testing."

"They do not understand that as a concerned teacher, I am trying to help their children in many ways different than just classroom work."

"They feel a teacher should teach what is in the book and nothing else. They do not realize a teacher also has to teach discipline, nationalism, accepted norms and values of society, leadership, how to write, speak, and get along with their peers, to name a few."

"Many parents fail to understand that English is composed of reading, language, and composition. Some parents feel that the reading of books and the discussion of contemporary problems have no place in the English classroom. Many of these same parents feel that 'grammar' is the only important part of an English course. This is, of course, absurd. Teaching the student to read critically and to think rationally is a very important part of the English curriculum."

Here are some more misconceptions of the role of the teacher:

"Many seem to feel that a person who is a good disciplinarian and lectures well has all the attributes of a good teacher. That he must also be a good listener, organizer, clerk, counselor, diagnostician of learning difficulties, and prescriber of remedies, etc., escapes the parents' attention."

"Many parents emphasize the babysitting function of public schools. If this is what they really want, I would think the school could hire babysitters instead of teachers at a lot less expense. Much too much emphasis is placed on watching every student every minute of every school day."

"Parents tend to think that if a child does not do well in your class, it's your fault."

"Try telling parents that their son is not achieving because he does not study at home. They think if Johnny is not learning, then the teacher is not teaching."

"The whole system is bad that allows parents power in education which sometimes approaches a veto over what goes on in a classroom. Principals and board members are too vulnerable (or feel they are) to parents. If an educational and legitimate reading book, or a class discussion, has the wrong four-letter word in it, that is enough to get a teacher fired."

"If we do a good job, parents take the credit for success; but if there is slow progress, the failure is the teacher's."

"Parents don't understand that I am the best friend their son or daughter ever had, that I am intelligent, well-educated, sincere, human, that I probably have more influence on their offspring and know their offspring better than they do."

2

Many parents shirk and shift their family responsibilities, these teachers said:

"Parents neglect their responsibility, forcing teachers to assume more and more of the 'learn at home' duties such as sex education, common manners, moral values, etc."

"Many parents expect the teacher to do at school what they cannot or have failed to do at home. They expect the teacher to be father, mother, friend, educator, counselor, minister, and psychologist. Yet they won't pay him, back him up, or give him the tools to perform."

"The teacher takes over when the parent leaves off. And ever so many parents leave off early in the child's development."

"They misunderstand that teachers are not parent substitutes. The attitude of many parents, especially if both work, is that their job consists solely of providing bed and occasional board for their children. They expect teachers and schools to raise their children for them."

"They do not understand that we are hired to teach and not to serve as moral guidance counselors. They do not understand that we practice an art. They do not understand that a school educates what a home provides, in student raw material. They do not understand our social position and treat us as social freaks and public lackeys."

"They expect the teacher to develop in the student in 45 minutes a day what the parent has failed to accomplish in 15 years."

3

Parents have memories of the schools and teaching in their own youth and assume this makes them knowledgeable today:

"All parents consider themselves qualified to judge education just because it's the one thing they have all been through themselves."

"Since all of them have gone to school, they are all 'experts' in the field."

"Parents seem to think they know what happens today in school because they went years ago."

"All my friends who are college graduates think they know as much about education as a trained teacher, simply because they have been to college."

"When I go to an attorney or to a physician, or any other professional persons, I do not try to tell them how to do their jobs. Why do parents feel they know all the answers, and try to tell us how to teach, what to teach, how to grade, etc., etc., etc.?"

"Most parents still have a mental picture of school and teachers as in their own school age. They send their children in full confidence that the child is cared for. But if the public really knew what goes on in some classrooms and outside the school gates, they would demand more discipline and more positive results for the money spent."

4

Students are different and that means teaching must be different:

"Few parents understand or accept the changes in attitudes among young people."

"Most parents do not realize the alteration of values we are facing in young people."

"Parents do not realize how the world is changing and that new teaching methods may be more appropriate. I have seen many young creative teachers leave the field or change their methods to the traditional due to pressure from administration, board members, and parents."

"Parents do not understand that the stilted, unrealistic material found in 'traditional' textbooks does not speak to our age. The real problem, of course, is that these parents have never developed intellectually themselves. They do not care to think, to wonder, to create, and thus cannot understand why the curriculum today is inadequate."

"They do not seem to understand that the role of the teacher has changed from 'fact dispenser' to one who tries to teach students what to do with facts. The teacher tries to teach the learner how to learn, more than what to learn."

"They don't understand the change occurring in good schools, particularly in student freedoms and personal responsibility. Parents apparently feel that teachers somehow *make* a student learn, whereas students must be shown *how* to learn."

"Parents don't seem to appreciate the need to support the school system by getting involved in the education of their children. I feel very alone in the difficult job of equipping youngsters with the skills they must have to succeed."

"Many parents in this very affluent neighborhood apparently feel that when they have brought a child into the world, they have done their duty."

And there were many more on this subject:

"Parents seem to think that children who have not been stimulated at home for years should all of a sudden be greatly motivated by their teachers. I have students who never do anything with their families (such as play games or go on picnics) but always sit and watch TV. How am I supposed to get these children to do anything *but* sit in class?"

"They 'cannot do a thing with them at home,' yet expect you to perform miracles on their children at school."

"Many parents expect the school system to teach manners, social behavior, and self-discipline."

"Parents increasingly seem to be giving up their responsibilities at home and expect teachers to replace them in training their children. Teachers spend less time educating and more time as 'parents' for their students. Parents seem to think this should be part of our job."

"A good deal of the responsibility the family used to shoulder has been passed on to the schools, but the authority that the family had, has not been passed on. We try to teach a higher caliber or level in every subject, but we cannot enforce the requirements for course completion."

"Parents feel that teachers and schools are the ones responsible for making decent, moral citizens out of their children. They are shirking their responsibilities as parents. They want the schools to teach manners and respect. They want us to teach them how to dress, how to be socially accepted. Education is second to all this."

"The public believes that schools, all by themselves, can totally dominate a student's learning. But more learning is done outside school than inside. The whole attitude of a student toward learning is developed outside, primarily at home. Without a wholesome attitude, no student will learn, no matter what the school does. The public must take some responsibility when it comes time to point the finger at who is to be accountable."

"Parents want accountability at school but when it comes to parent accountability, they say no."

"They give students new cars and this distracts from academic pursuits. Then they either allow or insist on a part-time job to pay for car insurance; in either case, the student is too tired for school."

"They seem to think that if they make sure the student leaves the house at 8:30 in the morning, traveling in the direction of school, that their task is finished until he returns home in the afternoon."

Many parents haven't "kept up":

"When most of today's parents were in school, corporal punishment was a part of discipline. They cannot understand why the schools cannot *make* the student of today do anything."

"Basically, it's a matter of parents not understanding new trends in theology (I teach religion), new methodology to teach religion to today's teen-agers, and the fact that there is something more important than knowledge and external uniformity, namely, proper motivation. For example, the notion of sin. It is not enough to tell kids a thing is sinful. You have to develop a sense of what sin is and then apply this as you go along to particular cases."

"People still think of learning as a transfer of information. But a school is not a factory. It does not and cannot turn out a 'product'. I cannot simply lecture and relate what I 'know' and truly communicate. I cannot implement the complex behavior that leads to learning if I do nothing more than give assignments. I have got to relate with students as whole and complicated human beings. Otherwise, we don't need teachers. We need only textbooks and computerized tests."

5

The only important thing to some parents, the teachers said, is the grade:

"Many parents have a naive trust in the grade as an indication of success."

"Their attitude seems to be 'if you don't understand it, memorize it—just bring home a decent grade.' That is what they give their children. There is fantastic emphasis on right answers and very little appreciation for the act of learning and discovering."

"You could give him all A's and not teach a thing, and parents would be satisfied. They are concerned only with the child's having a good grade on the card, not with what the child has learned."

"Parents in this community stress objective knowledge, memorization of proven, cold, hard facts. If a kid can come home and recite the names of all the cabinet members, mom and dad are happy. They believe in heavy competition and place much importance on class rank. They honestly believe that if Johnny is No. 1 in his class rank, that he is the most intelligent student in the school. They disapprove of open campus (voluntary attendance) because they do not trust their children because they have never let them make important decisions and be responsible for their consequences. They've always had a rigid structured plan for their kids to be forced into—grade school, good grades; high school, good grades; college, good grades; job, good money and security. They fear that if Johnny really gets to choose his own future, he might choose a future radically different from their structured vision. These parents don't want children, they want computers."

6

Many parents are unrealistic in their expectations and demands:

"They push kids to get good grades, to go to college. They expect teachers to get students through the class whether or not the students make any effort."

"They do not understand realistic goals for their children. When the majority of students belongs in a vocational or technical area, it is unbelievable the stress that is placed on college-going."

"They feel you owe their individual child all of your attention during school and after school and on weekends."

"The public refuses to face the realities that we need to do more in drug education, sex education, and value teaching."

"They misunderstand my job. They think I'm an answer or lecture machine. I'm not. Sometimes I lecture to set the stage, but I don't give answers. I'm a guide, a friend, a pathfinder."

"As I have been exposed to them, parents are more concerned with their children's social life than they are with their academic accomplishments. And if they are interested in the academic accomplishments, it's not so much on how the student can excel but rather how little he can do and still pass the course."

"Parents do not understand the limitations of their children in reading and math. At my school, 50% of the students need help in reading. We tested 10th graders in reading, and 72% were at a 6th grade level or below."

7

Some parents want the schools to teach only what they (the parents) believe in:

"Parents are skeptical of anything new. Many want schools and teachers to perpetuate the beliefs and biases taught at home. Often they don't want their kids to learn—they just want them to be indoctrinated with the 'proper' values and beliefs."

"They don't understand that each teacher is an individual with his or her own values. They expect teachers to reflect and teach only the values of the parent. For instance, a parent who feels that sex is a taboo subject expects his child's teacher to feel this way, too, even though the teacher may feel very strongly about the importance of a good sex education program. A parent who panics at the thought of teen-agers and drugs doesn't want his child exposed to a teacher who doesn't strongly and obviously disapprove of drug use—or who at least doesn't come on too strong for fear of turning kids off. A John Bircher thinks a liberal teacher can only take his child downhill. And the list could go on and on and on."

"Most seem to think of teachers as extensions of themselves. They project their own hopes and plans on their children and then expect today's teacher to push the student toward that goal."

8

Some parents don't know much about their children in school:

"Many parents can't tell you what subjects their children are studying or who their teachers are."

"Parents do not try to understand. In the five years I have taught at this high school, fewer than 20% have shown up on 'open house' occasions; 99% of these are parents of the nonproblem child. During those five years, I have had only five parents request a conference. My average student load has been about 140 per school year. Most parents just do not care."

9

Some parents fail to get the facts:

"They obtain their information from gossip or hearsay. Also they have a tendency to make up what they don't know."

"The distinction between teaching *about* a subject and indoctrination is often blurred by parents. Another district where I formerly taught suffered from uninformed parents charging teachers with 'teaching' sex and 'teaching' communism. Often teachers labor under fear—real fear of misguided community reaction."

"They can't remember ever being friends with their teachers; therefore, they are afraid when their children talk about teachers as friends. They misunderstand friendship and are liable to jump on the smallest bit of rumor and expand it into stories which can undermine a teacher."

10

What some parents misunderstand is how hard teachers work and how much pay they deserve:

"Some parents think that teachers have it made because they teach for just nine months. Well, I don't because I teach five courses, a night class twice a week, and sponsor the school newspaper, pep squad, and basketball and football cheerleaders."

"They don't understand that I never work less than 10 hours a day, they don't understand what I'm required to do in summers, and they don't stop to think what other people are making. A laborer in our city at $6 an hour makes $10,000 or so in 195 days; with four years' teaching experience, I make only $8,260, and yet people have the gall to say teachers make too much."

"People want the best for their kids but scream when education costs go up."

"Many parents complain about a small increase in taxes when they are willing to pay $12 an hour to a plumber to fix the pipes in their house or buy a new $100 party dress for their daughter and the spring formal. A teacher guides and influences their child's life. You'd think a child is worth more than a clean pipe."

"Many times parents have the feeling that teachers are out for an 'easy' job rather than trying their best to benefit their students."

"They feel the teaching occupation is still made up of a group who can *do* nothing, so they teach."

"A goodly number of the townspeople class teachers as second-rate citizens; their children reflect the philosophy of their parents."

"They don't feel we should be paid very much, but if you coach, like me, you don't leave school until 6 p.m. Those extra hours are not included in my check, yet they gripe if we lose a game."

11

The demands on the personal lives of teachers drew these comments:

"Parents expect teachers to be beyond reproach, to have no faults socially, financially, or family-wise. Socially we are made to feel apart; we are looked down upon if we drink or dance and as a young teacher they expect me to wear long skirts and high collars instead of acting my age. Finally, the family of a teacher should be perfect and we should have perfect children. We are only human!"

"Most parents usually think of the teacher as a person who should be very saintly and puritanical. This, they conclude, is essential to good teaching. Example: I was invited to a party by my sister-in-law, who is a nonprofessional. When I entered, one of the mothers there approached me and jokingly questioned me about being there. Later in the evening, she delivered a long speech about making sure that her children never had me or any other teacher like me as their teacher, only because I was dancing and drinking. I was, but not excessively."

12

Teachers cited these parents as misunderstanding a variety of subjects:

"Some parents are just looking for things to jump on the school about. Example: In freshman history, we planned a political nominating convention complete with 'demonstrations' for each party's candidate. We got 20 phone calls from parents because we were teaching their children to DEMONSTRATE!"

"Some of them do not want you to discipline their children at all. Example: One little boy whose father is a doctor thinks he should do exactly as he wants to. Don't hit me, he says, or my father will sue you (which he is known for doing)."

"Many of the parents do not realize how their little angels change when they arrive at school."

"Above-average-income parents don't understand why their social position has NO relationship to their child's work in my class."

"Parents do not realize our high schools are filled with students who have no intention of getting an education. They are in school simply because they are made to be by their parents or because it is easier than a job. Parents do not realize that this type of student makes up 15% to 25% of all our enrollment."

"A dangerous misunderstanding exists when teacher and student are of different races. If the teacher is black and the student white, parents often assume that the teacher is incompetent. If the teacher is white and the student black, parents often assume that the teacher is prejudiced against the child. These parental attitudes are widely held and cause much hardship for teachers."

"These parents misunderstand proper values for their children. Some parents emphasize the price of clothes, for example, instead of the worth of the individual. Some do not come to school to encourage their students who participate in plays, assemblies, and the like. These people are the ones who look for grades instead of the worth of the individual child."

"That students should have respect for all teachers, instead of (as here) calling teachers 'Doll' and 'Hi, you' and 'Battle Ax'—and when corrected, telling teachers to 'go to hell.' "

"They don't understand many of the things I really teach. It's probably just as well, or I'd be in trouble."

"I wish they could be made to understand that the kids they can't stand during the summer or during vacations are what we learn to love, along with 149 more just like them."

"They fear a 17-year-old who is smarter than they. They believe it is all right to teach their children *The Scarlet Letter,* filled with insipid sexual allusions, but we must not permit them to read, much less teach, books which are relevant and real (books by Green, Camus, Vonnegut, Bradbury, Baldwin, Faulkner, Bellow, Hesse). What we teach their darlings must be material which has 'jelled with age'. Unfortunately our entire educational system has 'jelled with mediocrity'. Parents expect the teacher to mold the character of their children, to provide them with values (as long as they are the parents' values), to discipline them; yet those same parents scream when a teacher attempts to reach turned-off students with new and applicable materials. Because of parental complaints regarding the 'liberality' of a teacher or a curriculum, our sources of study have degenerated into rigidly structured programs which stress fact over relevance, organization over applicability, Victorian acceptability over 1971 reality. (Not all parents insist upon this mediocre curriculum, but those who do not are doing nothing to effect a change.)"

Teachers Tell about Legislators

1

These legislators were accused of "playing politics" with education:

"The state legislature has spent more time on 'bingo' this year than it has on education in the last three years."

"Political parties refuse to view education from a nonpartisan approach but continue to vote taxation measures along party lines. This results in deadlocks, to the detriment of education at all levels."

"Too frequently, legislators treat education as a second cousin. Education bills are not placed on the agenda until the closing day of a biennial legislature in our state."

"Too many legislators represent selfish local interests in which they are involved. We need people to represent the whole of education, and more often."

"Instead of proving that good education must have the monetary support of the people, many legislators kowtow to the citizenry to insure their own reelection; thus the educational system becomes the pawn of politicians."

"The money allotted to schools is 'kicked about' at each session. Thus, one is not certain he may initiate a much-needed experimental program, purchase AVA materials which could improve the learning situation, or even change to a newer text."

2

These teachers complain that legislators are unrealistic:

"They can't understand why education can't be measured. Each dollar spent is expected to yield some immediately identifiable return."

"They don't understand that it is almost impossible to find a fair way to measure teacher competence. And yet they all believe themselves to be experts in education."

3

There were many comments about legislators and money:

"What legislators misunderstand is that each child in the state should have an equal opportunity for a quality education and that this costs much money."

"They misunderstand how fast time goes and how much costs are rising. They are still back in the 'dollar-an-hour-is-good-pay' days mentally."

"They don't seem to understand that the people here are not against paying for better education, they just feel overtaxed. Education is the only taxation they have control over; therefore, they are now voting down any raise in taxes for education. This is not a vote against education but against unjust taxation."

"The need for tax reform seems to be recognized by all but those people (legislators) who have the power to change it."

"Legislators think teachers are paid a fair wage, but in many states, garbage collectors and custodians receive more pay than we do. Our income should compare with that of a lawyer or a doctor. We have future citizens in the making and this is important to the salvation of all of us."

"The legislators do not understand that the money spent to improve our schools will pay immense dividends in the future."

"They are too old and do not understand the money needed to run the schools. Times have changed and they have not."

"They think teachers ask for more money for salaries. They are not aware of the disgraceful conditions under which we teach—lighting not up to state standards, roaring heating units, 10-year-old textbooks, etc., etc.—and there is no money for any repairs or materials. I don't ask for much, but teaching in an ugly dungeon 183 days a year with minimum materials is a bit discouraging."

And there were many more:

"They feel that chalk and a blackboard are the only 'supplies' necessary for teaching."

"They think teachers are overpaid because [and this is a direct quote] 'they make almost as much as sales clerks.' "

"My state is so riddled with graft and misgovernment that no one cares or seems to realize that teachers are people with families and responsibilities just like any one else. Example: Our state legislature passed a salary increase in 1968 under threat of a strike. This calmed most teachers but then the legislature failed to appropriate the funds necessary to let us have the increase. In 1970, again under threat of a strike, they implemented 3/4 of the increase with a promise to appropriate the remaining 1/4 in 1971. The talk now is to not only put the teachers off for another period of time but to cut the present salary. At the same time, the state department of education has over 3,000 unclassified employees, some drawing salaries of over $9,000 for part-time employment. Need I say more?"

"I really don't think they misunderstand. They raised their own salaries—and say they do not have money to give the teachers a raise."

"The legislature in our state is bureaucratic, entrenched, corrupt. In dealing with teachers, the name of the game is 'pass the buck'. First, the legislators tell the teachers to communicate their needs to their respective representatives; then when the teachers do this, they are told in no uncertain terms that they are badgering and pressuring the legislature. As Chaucer's Monk said so blandly, 'How shall the world best be served' as he gaily rode the very best horses or dined elegantly on roast swan; here and now, our legislators ride in Cadillacs or Lincoln Continentals, raise their own salaries, and berate the peasants (us teachers) for demanding a decent living wage. The feudal system prevails and the peasants go hungry and barefooted."

4

These teachers felt their legislators did not comprehend:

"I don't feel the legislators in our state understand anything."

"Our state senator believes you can train 20th century students to live in the 21st century by using 19th century methods."

"Some legislators in our state don't believe teachers are people and don't know that teachers pay taxes. I don't believe the majority of legislators know what teaching is like, know what is accomplished in schools, or understand the necessities of a good school in atmosphere, equipment, and personnel. Neither do they understand what education means in its fullest sense of an active, working, contributing mind and body or the value of having such educated citizens."

5

These comments had to do with tenure:

"Our legislators totally lack any understanding of the meaning of tenure and tried to do away with it."

"In our school, we have an excellent principal, an inept superintendent. The principal would have been hamstrung without tenure—but the legislature has abolished tenure for principals, beginning next year."

6

These legislators do not understand the special problems of the inner city, these teachers said:

"Most legislators are older and are not aware of how schools have changed, especially in large metropolitan areas and inner-city areas. Many legislators are from rural communities where there are no 'problems'. They refuse to change the tax structure, so the inner city continues to suffer from lack of funds."

"We have a rural-dominated legislature oblivious to the problems of inner-city education. Yet the value structure of inner-city students demands special attention and special programs. This priority must transcend all aspects of our educational system from the legislature down. But as of now, we have neither their understanding nor their support."

7

Teachers wrote this about legislators and nonpublic schools:

"They do not understand that parochial and private schools are important to the total public welfare and teachers in these schools are doing a tremendous job for low pay to give top quality education along with the moral and character training necessary for solid citizenship. These legislators refuse to vote funds so parents can send their children to schools which give full education, yet the public school system rapidly is becoming an unmanageable monolithic giant."

"The legislators play politics with the development of our most precious resource—human potential—by putting political careers above the common good. In our state, they were so crass as to refuse funds for busing handicapped children because they were attending a private school."

"Many legislators have said they would vote no (before any debate or discussion in the legislature) to state aid for nonpublic schools. They are misinterpreting the original meaning of separation of church and state."

"I have taught in both the public and parochial schools and know there is more educating going on in the Catholic school, yet the government has turned its back on these schools. (By the way, I am a Protestant.)"

8

Teachers criticized these legislators for a variety of reasons:

"They refuse to allow teachers to do the things other citizens can do—strike, drink in public, get into trouble, etc., without affecting their employment as a teacher."

"They feel it is their duty to control us as they would construction of a highway or a dam."

"The amazing thing is that even though the legislators are the people who appropriate millions of dollars for education, they seldom appear in a school. To combat this, teachers must become more politically active, so that legislators know they will be informed by educators and indeed defeated by educators if they do not respond positively to the needs of education."

"They refuse to change the state laws on public employees striking, so teacher salaries remain comparatively low."

"They do not realize that stuffing our classes with up to 40 students hurts the students' learning process."

"Legislators and the courts make it increasingly tough to expel or even suspend a student as punishment."

"They won't allow teachers to set their own standards and police their own ranks as doctors and lawyers do."

"In our state, they have banned sex education in the schools."

"Lawmakers think the wishes of teachers and their representatives are just a big joke."

"They would like to see teachers work under conditions set up by other groups. We should work without having any say in the decision-making process."

"When our legislature is in session, it is a danger to man, woman, child, and dog."

Teachers Tell about Nonparent Taxpayers

1

Nonparent taxpayers have these attitudes about the cost of schools, the teachers wrote:

"They usually vote NO on bond issues and often do not vote at any other election."

"They are selfish and feel no need to support schools so long as they have no children attending."

"They have become so taxed they fail to recognize the difference between worthy taxes and frivolous taxes. I find it abhorrent that taxpayers will pass a levy to pay for a new sports complex for football and baseball and reject two or three school bond levies, thus closing schools several weeks early."

"They don't feel responsible for a program in which they receive no direct benefit. The retired person feels he has paid his way."

"Their only knowledge of school comes from what it was like when they were there. Therefore they are quite often anti-changes that may make education relevant and effective, because the changes are too different from what they're used to."

"Some feel that now their children are grown, they should not pay for the support of schools. They forget that education for today's youth will protect their health, home, and comfort."

"The taxpayer sees school budgets as the one area where he can vote directly on his tax rate and thus singles out the school for condemnation. He fails to understand that education is an investment in our country's future."

"They see no connection between themselves and students being educated today."

"They sometimes forget others helped educate them."

"A common complaint of theirs is 'why aren't readin', 'ritin', and 'rithmetic enough? Why all the frills?' "

"He forgets he is the product of free education and now all he can think of is the cost. Perhaps taxation is a legitimate gripe, but until a better method is contrived, we must use what is available."

"Voting 'no' on a school budget is a negative way to approach the problem of how to ease the burden on the property-tax payer. More taxpayers should be working to change the source of revenue for the schools."

"They are tender around the pocketbook."

"Their pocketbook is involved but not their hearts."

"The only thing these people are concerned about is the almighty dollar. They are selfish and concerned only with their own needs."

"For years, the taxpayers got what they paid for, and in some cases they paid too much. Now, to get and keep quality in education, it will cost a lot more than it has."

This teacher was sympathetic:

"But older persons living in their own homes and depending on Social Security benefits should certainly be given a tax break."

2

Taxpayers have these ideas about teachers:

"They seem to believe that a teacher just sits at a desk while knowledge rolls from his mouth, and have no conception of the emotional strain and drain of teaching."

"It is the being not only a teacher but a counselor, parent, policeman, etc., all day that is so demanding. It is the constant giving of oneself to others, every minute of the day, that the taxpayers don't understand."

"Many of them leave their work at the office when the workday is over. Teachers spend much time at home correcting papers, planning, and studying. Yet teachers are criticized for not earning their pay. This is nonsense."

"The continued defeat of school bond issues reveals that taxpayers do not understand the role of the teacher. There is not enough respect for a teacher nor for his abilities or for the hours he puts in. The stereotype hangs on—the unambitious guy who cannot do anything else and who enjoys the few hours of the teaching profession. We as teachers must educate the general public to the fact that a good teacher is an artist—gifted, intelligent, patient, and willing to work long hours."

"These people do not know what is going on so they think we sit in our ivory tower with our hands out asking for more, more, more. . . ."

"If to have a livable income, a teacher has to take another job and his mind is not on his teaching but is split, so then is his ability to be as productive as the public expects him to be."

"They pay anything for their car's repair and maintenance but want to pay nothing for good teachers."

"People notice when you go home 'early' at 4 p.m. but the same people never see you when you arrive at 6 a.m."

"They feel that because of the increase in school taxes, teachers are concerned only with making money. Ridiculous! I know no rich teachers."

"They think teaching is an 8 to 5 job, and in reality, it is neither. (Anyone who considers his teaching activities a 'job' should get out.)"

"They seem to think teachers are a class all by themselves outside the human race. When teachers desire a change in salary, conditions, etc., they use the 'logic'—'you knew what it was like before you got into it, if you don't like it, get out.' But they never say this about electricians, carpenters, steel workers, or any other group."

3

This is what the teachers reported nonparent taxpayers also misunderstand about students:

"They blame the school for the things in young people that they see as being bad."

"They believe that cutting taxes will solve all their woes, give them more money to spend, and that kids can get by without books, pleasant surroundings, and qualified teachers."

"They often misunderstand the need to reach every student—the academic, vocational, and the difficult to teach, and the need for new programs to help students learn about minorities, social responsibilities, and personal discipline."

"They misunderstand and think that kids are bad because they follow fads."

"They fail to recognize the greater difficulty in holding student interest. They forget that a generation ago, academically disoriented pupils dropped out earlier and did not show up as teacher failures at the high school level."

"They don't understand the needs of children and I'm not sure they care."

"The actions of a few students really turn off this group of taxpayers."

"They expect schools to continue to educate kids with yesterday's funds. Somehow, inflation affects everyone except schools and teachers."

"They have forgotten how much energy and curiosity youth have. It costs money for teachers and materials to challenge their thinking."

4

And finally, these comments:

"They still are under the impression that 'those who can, do; those who can't, teach; those who can't do either, teach teachers to teach.' "

"Too many people misunderstand the purpose of education. We get questions like 'What is the use of poetry (or music or art or foreign languages, etc.)?' I find it depressing that the people who support the schools do not understand that the 'use' of education is to make people more human."

"The teacher must always defend everything about his profession with his friends, neighbors, and the public. I feel very little dignity any more when someone asks, 'What kind of work do you do,' and I say 'a teacher.' Anyone with a college degree ought not to have to feel this way."

"Rumor plays a large part in misunderstanding. People tend to react to negative rumors. A neighbor of mine said she voted against the school budget 'because there were too many high-paid brass at the administration office.' She said she had heard someone say that at the beauty salon."

Teachers Tell about News Reporters and Broadcasters

1

Many of the teacher criticisms of the news media revolved around money:

"They don't realize that we work outside of school hours, that teaching is an emotional strain, that we invested heavily in our education and deserve to be paid adequately, that much of our summer vacation is spent improving our teaching ability, or that teachers are also taxpayers."

"Their goal is not to inform the public and create understanding of the school system but instead to magnify trivia and promote themselves as defenders of the local pocketbook."

"The editorial approach in the leading newspaper is consistently negative. Using half-truths and innuendo, they present everything from the cost of living and professional pay to enthusiasm for *Schools without Failures* as shady motives on the part of teachers."

"They are always playing the public taxpayer against the teacher."

"They misunderstand the problems that face teachers in discipline, salary schedules, keeping abreast, and teacher-board relations."

"Increased costs for education is what they misunderstand—rising teacher salaries, AV equipment, building additions and improvements, more modern textbooks. Generally, teachers favor all of these but the local news media always relate each of them to the general public as unnecessary and costly."

"News reporters and broadcasters seem to misunderstand us especially during salary negotiations. We are often seen as 10-month workers who want too much salary. In reality, we want a salary and working conditions which befit a professional educator."

One respondent suggested this as a reason for the media approach:

"Being low paid themselves, the reporters often feel that teachers are overpaid, underworked, and always on vacations. Incidentally, I think that this might also include editors."

2

The media overemphasize the negative or the trivial, the teachers thought:

"They look for the newsworthy excitement features—riots, athletics, etc., rather than the educational aspects of school life."

"They use only part of a situation. The part used is for sensational purposes or to promote the topic they feel important that day. It also is used to create controversy and unrest in the community or in a dissenting group."

"Outstanding performance of teachers and teen-agers: page 22. Mistakes by teachers and teen-agers: page 1."

"They bring out the worst in people. Young people wouldn't do near as many things as they do if they did not see it on TV."

"They misunderstand or at least misrepresent aims and goals of teachers, downgrade the image of teachers, compare and equate teaching with less professional fields, and publish more negative than positive incidents."

"They never look for good news, but if trouble occurs around school, they are right there."

"News is bad or it is not printed. Many young people are considerate, conscientious, and dedicated to good. They receive no publicity."

3

News out of context was seen as a problem:

"They are often misinformed and tend to generalize. Drug problem reports are a good example. We had a drug education presentation to give students a knowledge of terms, but this was misconstrued as evidence of drug usage."

"They sometimes sacrifice the heart of a discussion for a side remark picayune in nature, but capable of making a glaring headline."

"They misunderstand that considerations that appear trivial, e.g., dress and haircuts, can have a marked effect on the education program because of disruptive influence. That problems imposed on schools because of urban concentrations are difficult to solve, and that necessary changes are often thwarted because of political considerations."

"They never talk to teachers. They do to principal, superintendent, or someone who is not on the firing line."

"Many issues are taken out of context. The glorified portions of the situation are reported, not the complete situation. This was recently seen when we had a relaxation of hair and dress codes."

"They do not lie but do tend to tell one side."

4

The reporters aren't always knowledgeable, the teachers said:

"They are usually writing articles about areas of education they know very little about."

"Some tend to express 'expert' opinions in a field in which they have a very limited understanding."

"They twist and misrepresent things that happen in the schools. They do not check with people who should know."

"They give space to blowhards and fatheads who talk about our school system but don't investigate or report their backgrounds."

5

And there were these additional statements:

"They appear to report what they want rather than both sides of the story. This group reports what they think the people want to hear, not what really exists. How many times have you seen teacher salaries and class loads stated in the paper? How many times have social issues been stated accurately? How many times have important statements been freely interpreted? This group's ability to distort facts is almost unbelievable."

"What it's like to have some kid tell you to go to hell."

"They don't understand the many variables the teacher must cope with every day—the tremendous emotional and physical effort involved in interacting with 150 individuals daily."

"Our newspaper does not understand the part that good facilities and ample time for preparation play in good teaching."

"They tend to overplay race relations and make a picture that does not represent the truth."

"The newspaper in our community has been unkind to school teachers. They often 'blame' teachers for any disruptions, student failings, etc. One instance during a racial disturbance, the newspaper personnel told of teachers who bodily broke up fights by 'swinging and hitting'. The truth was that our faculty could do no hitting or defending of themselves and some were even knocked down because they couldn't defend themselves."

"They believe that man is perfectible and that all the school has to do is condemn prejudice, show a few patronizing films of 'great Black Americans,' hire 'minority teachers,' and spend money, money, then problems will cease."

6

Finally, this perceptive comment helps express the difficulty that accompanies any attempt to report any event with total accuracy:

"They tend to report opinion or gossip rather than fact and information. Part of this is, of course, a human failing. Each of us reports what he sees according to his ability to interpret what he sees, based on his own training and background."

Teachers Tell about School Board Members

1

Qualifications and aims of school board members brought out some of the teachers' most critical remarks:

"It seems insane to me that in the United States, teachers, principals, and superintendents spend a lifetime becoming educated in the business, and then the community elects a school board of laymen to tell them what to do."

"On the whole, board members are uneducated but try to act smart—when they really are dummies."

"They live in a little world of their own. They are not educated in the field of education, but have the say-so on how the money will be spent, and what for. Most are on the board to further their own ego, not for the benefit of the school, students, or community."

"School board members don't know anything about teaching, have no background for making decisions, read one article on education and think they know everything, and enjoy being little tyrants. (I live in a small town.)"

"Until boards are abolished or prospective members can meet certain high qualifications, most teachers are going to be misunderstood and education is going to stand still."

"School board members are usually composed of feeble-minded citizens who are grasping for public recognition, seeking a scholarship for their sons and daughters, and trying to avenge some previous grievance."

"Our board has no idea what goes on in the schools. I heard one member ask an elementary teacher if she thought another teacher was doing a good job. I don't feel he should have based his judgment on her answer—but he did."

The criticism continues:

"A board of inexpert people should be stripped of the major portion of its policy-making power, and continued only as an advisory committee, as liaison between the school and community."

"It is a case of being uneducated themselves and often having an axe to grind in addition."

"School board members are the least qualified for the tremendous power that they can and do exercise. I realize that they are elected by the people, but it is also true that in many elections, it is a matter of trying to vote in the best qualified of a number of poorly qualified nominees. Too many of them run for the office merely because they are power-crazy, or have a bone to pick, or are out to 'get' someone."

"Usually men who run for this position have delusions of grandeur and exhibit their power by giving away tickets to sports events. (Remember, this is a small town and high school sports are the big events of the weekend.)"

"In education, the power of decision making is in educational illiterates."

"The biggest problem is a board member can be anyone who wants to run for office. It's like me being a board member for the American Medical Association and telling doctors how to operate, in which hospitals they could operate, how much they could charge for their services, and exactly what tools they could use—when I don't know anything about medicine. I think there should be a requirement that all board members have teaching experience."

2

School board members are too political, these teachers wrote:

"They are politically appointed and simply a cat's-paw for the mayor."

"They care most about votes. What does the conservative parent want? Seldom does one worry about what the students want."

"Most of the time they are blinded by the viciousness of local politics."

"They make their job political instead of a business."

"There is too much political consideration. The board is much more concerned with the public's opinion than with the classroom teacher's opinion. Many times action is taken solely on the request of persons in the community who are in a position of power, rather than seeking all of the information before acting."

3

Some board members judge by appearances and superficially, the teachers said:

"They hold to the belief that how a person dresses is how they act. They worry about how the students behave and look, not what they think, feel, and produce."

"The board judges superficially. Last year, its members were upset over the smoking habits of both teachers and students. This year, they're concerned with student dress. Neither of these is related to the educational process."

"Board members generally have been out of contact with youth too long to understand the problems and benefits of working with youth. They often act as if youth is something to fear, instead of believe in and put faith in."

"To a school board member, a noisy class is not learning, when in reality, it may be."

"They do not understand that we have to try to reach our students. Many of their absurd rules alienate students. I have had several students quit school because of the strict dress code. This is ridiculous."

"They have no idea what happens with either teachers or students. Most feel if it looks good on paper, an idea is great and aren't concerned with the actual effect."

"School board members are too much concerned with appearances, with the image of the school rather than with sound education."

On the other hand, a board that did not support a dress code also was criticized.

"Under pressure, the board would no longer back the principal on dress code. They don't feel this has anything to do with education and discipline. The teachers do."

4

These members were criticized for not respecting teachers as 'normal' thinking individuals:

"They do not understand that teachers are thinking beings and should be heard and listened to."

"They hired me as a competent expert in my field, and should allow me to function as such. I resent being treated as a money-hungry, power-grabbing child."

"They don't work with teachers so they never understand what the school is trying to do nor how we are trying to do it. They think only of money and feel they are working against us rather than with us."

"They fail to realize that teachers are people working for a living, and should not be thought of either as superdedicated public servants or as misfits looking for a soft job."

"They seem to be working against us on almost every issue from negotiations to retirement."

"They misunderstand that teachers care about education, that they can safely be included in decision making, that they know something about the necessary ingredients of a school—even if they have 'never met a payroll' (which is what they're always saying about us)."

"Two years ago, a strike by teachers was necessary for them to be allowed to elect their own bargaining representatives. Prior to this, the school board itself selected teacher representatives."

5

Some board members really treat teachers as second-class citizens:

"They treat teachers as inferiors. They make many important decisions affecting teachers without consulting them. They assume a teacher will misuse sick leave. They dock a teacher's pay when he goes to a professional meeting on a school day."

"They regard us not as professionals, but as servants. They have no idea of the conditions under which teachers work, nor do they attempt to find out."

"This board feels we need to spend more time in school (punch a time clock) and that we have too many vacations. Several members will not even admit that teachers do much take-home work. They hire us as 'experts' and then treat us as common laborers when it comes to decision making."

"These people do not understand what education is all about. They treat teachers like common laborers, but expect them to behave as professionals. Academic excellence, cultural activities, and sound instruction are given only lip service, while coaches are treated like members of a master race."

6

These board members attempted to control what the teachers thought and their value systems:

"In this system, the board is arch-conservative. They are against any form of sex, drug, or human relations education and also political education if it is not to the right. Any move to change the system or to support the low students (the ones making bad grades, involved in drugs, the troublemakers) is blatantly disapproved. If a person bucks the system (by starting a club for the alienated), one's contract will not be renewed. I was told not to support this group but did so anyway. My contract was not renewed."

"Teachers must encourage their students to think, but they must make sure that their students think the 'right' thoughts (i.e., what's socially accepted). School board members are the great arbiters of the 'truth' (the status quo, that is)."

"I was fired under the subterfuge that I was a marginal teacher. However, I later learned that pressure was applied by a board member who felt a short story I read in class was offensive. This man is an auctioneer with no understanding of today's youth nor the goals of the Language Arts Department."

"Our board members are afraid of ideas, and indifferent to or against many of the goals of modern educators. Our counselors and department heads have spent hundreds of hours conducting research to discover why our students do poorly on ACT and other standard tests. The board members were so unconcerned they refused a meeting to hear the findings of the group."

7

Integration was the subject of these comments:

"These elected officials cater to the more affluent members of our school district by allowing token integration in schools serving this particular group. No one can be truly interested in all youth if he is prejudiced in his ideas concerning race and makes every effort as a board member to keep certain schools segregated."

"They see the role of the school as solving the social ills of the past, and keeping a ratio of black to white in every school."

"They still expect Black students to play the old 'Uncle Tom' role. They also think they can remake Blacks into Whites."

"Our school board lives in the 'wealthy white' area. The city school, integrated and fully alive, is outside the board's understanding and experience."

8

Some board members interfere too much in administration:

"Our school board feels that it must have its finger on every activity of the school. The school administrators are only rubber stamps."

"In my district, they seem to forget why they hired a superintendent and principal and teachers. Once elected, they have their own personal programs and if everyone else doesn't agree, they're (the other people) at fault."

"School board members simply won't admit that administrators and teachers can be trusted to operate a school fairly efficiently, effectively, and without interference. They are always ready to listen to a few parents of wild, spoiled kids who were not disciplined when they were tiny."

9

And there is the subject of money:

"Most board members are businessmen and lawyers earning 25-60 thousand dollars a year, yet refuse to raise the top salary position for teachers beyond $10,000."

"Bargaining has degenerated to a mutual distrust."

"They are motivated by budget concerns rather than what is truly needed to interest students in school and keep them there. For example, if money is tight at our school, the first thing voted out is films and paperbacks, the two things that appeal to students most."

"Those elected members generally get into office on an economy platform and as one past board member here said, 'It don't make no difference if'n you got a degree or not, if you put in a full day's work for a full day's pay, you can teach school.' "

"They believe quality education can be bought for two cents."

"They think teachers as a group are not equal to or on a par with common labor, let alone professional people. We cannot feel good earning the kind of money we do."

"Our board is more concerned with keeping the amount paid out for teacher salaries down as low as possible than in keeping quality teachers."

"Money is poured into frills which impress not only school board members but parents, too, who by seeing a few pieces of elaborate modern equipment are actually convinced that their children receive a thorough and well-rounded background for a modern world. Meantime, the student-teacher ratio mounts. Thirty-five students plus is common in elementary grades, where reading abilities are crucial. Textbooks have to be fought for, tooth and nail. By the time such students, devoid of teacher attention and basic skills, reach high school, it is little wonder that they are 'attitude' dropouts when they confront an educational atmosphere not much different from earlier."

10
Finally, the teachers had these comments:

"The board tends to rely on the superintendent for its knowledge of education, and the super will usually tell the board what he wants it to hear, which is not necessarily an accurate picture. The result is an incredible gap between the board and the teachers. Just once, I'd like to hear of some board members actually visiting a classroom and listening to a teacher."

"Board members usually have the worst-behaved kids and gripe the most."

"A board member who is an armchair quarterback often wants sports to be overemphasized."

"They do not understand what it takes to run an effective school. If a student is expelled for disciplinary measures, all too frequently a well-placed phone call will have him reinstated the following day."

"They establish rules to fit the 8-to-4 teacher who doesn't give a damn about his job. There is very little allowance for the professional educator who is making teaching his life."

"They fail to enforce a discipline code that will remove the incorrigibles from the classroom, and fail to recognize that women cannot cope with many problems that should be solved by the police and courts."

"They do not care what parents think and have returned—unopened—surveys and views expressed by parent groups in our area."

"They don't understand that their lack of support for the discipline procedures of individual schools helps to deteriorate the educational process. Example: Our board has ruled that if a teacher-student problem cannot be resolved by the school principal and the student complains to the school board, that principal will be declared incompetent and removed. Therefore, a student can legally threaten a principal with loss of his job. That's too much student power."

Teachers Tell about Principals

1
Principals who once were teachers change when they get the administrative assignment, and that change is not always good, the teachers wrote:

"Principals forget their own teaching frustrations. Their new concerns as administrators override their past concerns as teachers. Hall patrol between classes, for example, is often a major issue for them; to the teacher faced with one class after another, with lingering students after class and the practicalities of refreshing oneself for the next class, hall patrol is next to impossible. The teacher is slave to bells which Poe never imagined."

"They expect teachers to do tasks they themselves didn't or couldn't do when they were teachers."

"When teachers become administrators, it seems their position gives them a sense of power. Their experiences as a teacher seem to be cut off in their decisions as an administrator. As a result, there appears to be a lack of communication between administrators and teachers. In other words, administrators become so conscious of public opinion that rather than protect and defend the teacher first, they think of their own necks first. The teacher is placed on the defensive and many times has to prove his worth rather than having the administrator defend that worth first."

"In this county, principals are almost exclusively former coaches, so they have never been in a classroom situation. They may be able to function in a strictly administrative capacity (personnel manager, public relations, etc.) but are dangerous when called upon to make educational policy decisions."

2

Some principals "put down" teachers:

"They misunderstand that we are people with thoughts, brains, opinions, ideas, capabilities, feelings. That we can and do see things through and are able to carry out decision making as well as tasks."

"They act in unprofessional manner at times, such as talking behind your back, back-stabbing rather than face the teacher with the problem, etc. They require nit-picky rules and regulations when, as professional teachers, we should be disciplined enough on our own."

"Some principals don't observe professional ethics. For instance, it is not professional to render teachers helpless in disciplinary situations by catering so much to the student's grievance that the student is made to feel equal to or above the teacher. It is not professional to make it clear to all, even by intercom announcements, that teachers have no more privileges than students (e.g., 'all teachers should be in class on time, beginning class promptly'). Such statements should be made in private or in a professional meeting."

"They tend to treat teachers the same way they treat students—as children, quite often to be seen and not heard. Every teachers meeting, the principal berates us for not standing in the halls before school and between classes, for handing things in late, for being out of the building when we shouldn't, and for many other infractions of 'the law'. These things are done by a very few; why can't he speak to them individually instead of being extremely unpleasant to the entire faculty?"

"The first day of school this year, the meeting was to have been in the cafeteria, as we were told by letter. The principal decided to change to the auditorium instead, and while all of us gathered in the cafeteria, he was in the auditorium. When we finally moved, all he did was tell us how stupid we are."

"Our principal exalts the known 'goof-off' artists, the 'scofflaws' (many come in late repeatedly and are never reprimanded, while others are 'chewed out' for one lateness), and sneers at the conscientious, hard-working members of the faculty. He makes derogatory statements such as 'the teachers around here don't teach the kids anything,' and 'the kids are smarter than the teachers,' and 'teachers aren't worth their salaries,' etc. He makes us ashamed to be a part of this team. He adds insult to injury by overloading the hard workers and easing up on the lazy."

3

Some principals are behind the times, these teachers charge:

"Our principal comes from the 'old school'. He tends to overemphasize subject matter and lessen the importance of teacher-student relationships."

"They do not tend to keep up with new trends in education, nor do they want to attempt new approaches to old problems. My principal, a special education administrator, is not in the least acquainted with the nature of problems of mental retardation. He does not try to know the students individually and he has only one way of responding to troubled situations—strictly authoritarian. One example: A very reserved, almost totally isolated boy was referred for possible counseling. The principal stated that he did not favor it, because the boy was not hostile or abusive in the classroom 'nor did he ever curse.' "

4

Does the principal really know best? These teachers don't think so:

"Many times, they feel they are the only ones with new or good ideas. They try to ride on one idea that has been successful and shut off all others until this wanes."

"We seem bound by this idea that the principal knows best, that what he says is in effect a directive from 'on high'. There are some excellent principals and there are some dolts. When the latter are directing things, teaching loses some of its appeal. I teach (and I'm damn good at it) because that's what I enjoy doing. I detest this hierarchy that puts someone who is not as qualified as a teacher in charge of an important part of my life."

5

These principals were cited for having the wrong goals:

"He wants innovations and teacher creativity for public relations but will not give the time or money and aid needed to experiment."

"Most seem to have very little true concern for the education of the student. Their major concern is centered around PR, activities, and sports. They seem to care less what's going on in the classroom."

6

Sometimes the administrators are too verbose:

"It often seems that they are playing a game, the object of which is to say the least possible with the greatest possible number of words."

"Principals should be required to take a course in 'terse verse': Say what you have to say and then shut up."

7

And there were these final comments:

"Principals don't seem to understand that teachers seek educational leadership from them, not just clerical supervision. Record-keeping is important to the management of a school but it is irrelevant when you get down to educating students."

"I am not interested in proving how great I am or how inferior my students are to me. I suspect my principal is."

"Our administration actually believes that there is a miraculous shortcut that will automatically take nonlearners to Yale. Their naivete is incredible."

"What's wrong with principals? Too much sitting in plush offices behind closed doors."

"Our principal is afraid to take a stand on any issue and stick by it. The teacher has no backing. This week as tardiness increased, the principal announced over the intercom that if it continued, he would add five minutes to each class. One student remarked: 'Don't worry; he's just bluffing as he has been on everything else.' Silently, I thought the same."

"Principals are old men who once were poor teachers, so they went into administration. Now they are poor administrators and schools would be better off without principals than with the quality of dictators we have."

Teachers Tell about Superintendents

1

Some superintendents are seen as having the wrong goals:

"Their concern is with schedules and rules, not with people and learning."

"They're too anxious to make things look good on paper, and too immersed in collecting useless data."

2

Others are without courage:

"They are insecure and thus follow the dictates of the school board."

"They tend to be a gutless breed. They protect stupid principals."

3

They're too interested in money, budgets, and economizing, these teachers say:

"Our superintendent does not help morale when he recommends a raise for nonprofessional employees which is twice the percentage being offered the teachers."

"They treat teachers as ignorant 'goof-offs' who don't deserve anything more than just enough money to keep them out of the board's hair. They want innovation and fresh ideas, and perfection 100% of the time, but just don't ask for any more money!"

"The superintendent is high enough financially that when it comes around to teacher salaries he is more concerned in meeting the school board requests than the teachers' because it will give him a higher salary if he can hold the budget down."

"I have been told by too many administrators that they entered administration for one reason only. Money."

"He is so interested in economizing he chops the most promising programs and expects us to be effective when understaffed."

4

Superintendents like this "put down" teachers:

"Downtown directives are aimed primarily at pleasing the taxpayer, and at cutting the teacher down in a way the teacher would not treat a child of any age."

"Unfortunately, we have a superintendent who generally mistrusts people and feels that they are not doing their job. It must be that he feels everyone is like him."

"Their picky little rules and regulations leave the distinct impression that they think teachers are sneaky, untrustworthy, little children whose hands must be smacked to keep them in line."

"Many superintendents think of teachers as warm bodies to fill a space in the classroom. They're too interested in perpetuating themselves."

"In this city, they continually dream up new programs without consulting the teachers they expect to make the programs work. Their edicts have created mass confusion regarding the curriculum."

"Too many poor classroom teachers have become administrators. If as a classroom teacher the superintendent lacked enthusiasm and respect for his position, I do not believe he will respect the efforts of his teachers, nor them as professional educators. Consequently, he will not be as selective as he ought in choosing his staff, nor as sincere as he should be in retaining the most qualified."

"Superintendents usually have been out of the classroom for years and do not even go back to observe the work of their teachers. They didn't stay in teaching and yet they don't support those of us who do. This would be all right if they made sure that the supervisors under them visited the classrooms. But in recent years it seems everyone is bogged down with paperwork, meetings, etc., to the point that no one has the time to observe the child and the teacher. The people who make the decisions about discipline, school assignments, textbooks, school schedules, and teacher load are people who have had no dealings with the child or his teacher."

"Superintendents are always making speeches on how their purpose is to educate the child. It's time that superintendents realize the teacher is the one who is educating the child and it is his place to support his teachers. The schools he superintends are only as good as the teachers there."

"In our city, the superintendent is the chief S.O.B. He says things on impulse when he should be quiet. For example, a state senator was in a question-and-answer session in a county teachers association meeting and was being pinned to the wall by one of the better teachers with some very direct questioning. The S.O.B. said out loud so the teacher could hear, 'I've got a number of applicants I can replace her with.' Does not a teacher have the right to speak out?"

5

Teachers declared these superintendents really don't know what's going on:

"Lots of book learning and theory, short on good ol' practical ways of doing things and common sense. Also, too afraid or too stupid to clean house at the administration building."

"Most superintendents are unaware of what is actually taking place in the classrooms of their realm. As long as a teacher makes no waves, stays in the room with her class, and passes at least 90%, she is never noticed by the superintendent. If she volunteers to serve at the punch bowl during a Saturday afternoon tea honoring school administrators, and sits on the front row listening intently to the same speech the superintendent has made three times a year for the past five years, he will probably label her an outstanding teacher' even though her classroom instruction may consist of mere educational pap."

"They seem to be so far removed from the actual educational experience that often their only concern is with preserving their own power-image at whatever cost. Too often there evolves a form of benign tyranny because the superintendent finds himself answerable (or imagines he is) for the very souls of those under his charge."

"A superintendent tends to see teachers as a segment of a larger thing. This is necessary to his job, but he tends to overlook the god-like powers a teacher is entrusted with. I mold minds, and that is the whole reason for the educational scene. How can a superintendent not feel the dilemma of a segment being more important than the whole?"

"They don't understand that what's the 'right' way for one teacher is not the 'right' way for all. That what reaches one student won't touch another. That the 'latest development' in education is not necessarily the only answer or the last word. That getting rid of teachers is not the only way to save money. That saying a school should 'individualize' its education—without funding for teacher preparation, materials, equipment, room space—is futile. That expecting a teacher to create a 'miniature world' for his foreign language students while moving between three or four rooms is IMPOSSIBLE!"

"Last September, I visited my superintendent and asked for assistance in an untenable classroom situation. He tried to dismiss the entire problem by referring to it as a 'challenge'. After I refused to accept this as a solution, he promised 'it will take time, but something will be done.' It did, and it was! On March 31, I was advised that my contract would not be renewed. The implied reason was incompetence. In three years at that school, I had received no adverse comment from any observer of my work and my principal had assured me that he and his staff had recommended that my contract be continued. To me, this is a clear case of judgment in absentia by a superintendent who did not bother to find out what was going on in the classroom."

6
And there were these final comments about superintendents:

"The tail appears to wag the dog. If a minority group is vociferous, our superintendent lets it get what it wants in staff and materials."

"The black-white ratio of teachers in a school is detrimental to good teaching. In my department, a vacancy occurred at midyear. As the superintendent insisted on a particular racial ratio, a competent, experienced white teacher was refused the job. The students had a long-term substitute until a black teacher was found. Though it was her first job and she was not the best teacher, she was given the job. No one cares about the children."

"To our superintendent, the number of students means more than quality. If you keep all of your students all year, you are considered a good teacher. If you lose some, you're not."

"I certainly wouldn't emulate our present one. Here is a man brilliant in knowledge but a retard in the field of human relations. It has never been observed but it is suspected he thinks he is the second person in history capable of walking on water. Egotistical and conceited to the nth degree, once he has made up his mind to a course of action, no amount of argument, logic, reasoning, facts, evidence, etc., can convince the man he had made a mistake or should change his mind. Only one other person was correct 100% of the time. . . ."

Teachers Tell about Students

1
Most students misunderstand teachers by classifying them as adversaries, these TEACH-POLL respondents wrote:

"To most students, teachers are ogres who compel them to read, write, study, and learn. They also see teachers as gestapo who pounce on rest rooms, hallways, and empty classrooms looking for misbehavior."

"Students feel teachers are out to 'do a job' on them."

"Students think teachers are interested in failing them. However, all the teachers I know are vitally concerned not only about the success of their students but also their happiness."

"They misunderstand why we give the types of assignments we do, why we have tests and grades, why we require punctuality, order, etc. Why we can't allow them to do certain things. The fence we have to ride between them and the administration. The pressure we're under from all sides."

"Students do not seem to recognize that teachers are very concerned about them. The 'teacher role' as it has existed has not been one of educational guide or helper, but rather as disciplinarian or punisher."

"Perhaps because of their lack of maturity, students often fail to see that the teacher is just an agent of school administration, required to do certain things beyond her control. She becomes the direct target for student frustrations with the system."

"Many students are in school because they are forced to go by parents or state laws. Teachers are there to teach and help students learn to study, not to be prison wardens, but students like this take their resentments and frustrations out on their teachers. These are the classroom troublemakers and school vandals."

The "contest" goes on and on:

"Students misunderstand the teacher's sincere desire to guide them in their education. If the teacher provides choice, the student will take advantage of the privilege and often waste time and play. If the teacher gives specific assignments, then students say he is a dictator and the course is not relevant. If the teacher says he likes students as human beings, they say he is a dope and should put his foot down and demand respect. How can you win?"

"Some students think teachers are jailers—persons to trick or lie to about absences and assignments not handed in."

"Somehow by the time they get to high school, many students feel a teacher is someone to 'play games' with. They view the teacher as someone trying to manipulate them so the challenge is to outwit the teacher. Until they develop an interest in the subject or some other motivation, they exert more energy just getting by than they would if they were serious about learning the subject."

"If they flunk a test, they hate the teacher."

"Teachers don't give failing grades to punish students. We try to be fair. Children can be demons at times!"

"Students misunderstand that the teacher is there as a friend and guide through the educational catacombs, not as another authority with rules and values to impose upon the youth. They have been forced to see the teacher as infallible and still they know many teachers are incompetent and afraid. They see the teacher as a source of facts and figures and rules—and nothing more."

"When students were assigned to write a letter to the teacher on any topic, one response was 'You're a teacher and I'm a student so I don't have anything to say to you.' "

And there was this one teacher who saw the "enemy" relationship as a sometimes valid one:

"Students misunderstand teachers most because they have been brainwashed, along with society as a whole, into thinking that teachers are their natural-born enemies whose main function is to spar with them, to coax them into learning something they don't really want to know. (Unfortunately, most teachers' actions still justify this hideous viewpoint.)"

2

Other teachers thought students misunderstood most the fact that teachers are human beings:

"Students think of teachers as not quite human. All the normal behavior of a human being—sex, feelings, errors—are outside the pale."

"They don't seem to realize that teachers are people, just like them. They seem to feel that teachers enjoy being powerful autocrats (which they must be at times)."

"Students do not seem to understand that teaching is a human enterprise, filled with fools and wizards similar to any other area."

"The students think I have nothing else to do besides correct tests, give makeup tests during lunch, and tutor after school. They misunderstand that although I enjoy my job, after work I have my own interests and I don't want to be a slave."

"Many have the absurd belief that teachers have no interests beyond the classroom. Teachers are, after all, human—quite a bit like students."

Might the students be right?

"They do not see teachers as real people in a real world. They may be right."

3

Many teachers suggest that students want the teacher to do all the work:

"More and more I have come to feel that students expect a 'Tonight' show performance with a guaranteed A from their teachers without making any effort themselves whatever."

"In my experience, students believe their own total understanding of a subject is entirely the teacher's responsibility. I see in their behavioral responses: the desire to have themselves 'spoon fed' with that information to be 'burped back' to the teacher; the inability to extend a concept to cover a problem that has a slightly different twist of the concept taught; great lack of study of concepts outside the classroom; inability to relate two or more concepts to one specific problem; inability to understand that most teachers wish to establish in them the ability to learn and comprehend and use the subject regardless of the subject taught; the idea that every item must have immediate relevancy or it's useless, and worst of all, students want to be taught this relevancy."

"They wish school to be constantly entertaining. They want to learn only what is easy, fun, or requires little effort. They can't grasp the idea that it would be good to learn all they can to the best of their ability, just in case they may need it some day. They can't understand why teachers get upset about absenteeism. They feel that history, English, and social studies are boring. They want to be rewarded even when they don't deserve it. They lack pride."

4

Other students' attitudes brought these teacher reactions:

"They misunderstand that the most attractive teacher or the one with the best personality is not necessarily the best teacher."

"They forget about the 40 years of service old teachers have devoted to the system, the fact that they have given their lives for it."

"How can youth be so often hell-bent on self-destruction (drugs, alcohol, physical and moral dirt), so sure that the country is not fit to serve, so disinterested in school?"

"Students tend to misunderstand teachers' methods—why material is covered as it is, why they are required to do certain tasks. They demand, more and more, freedom of learning individually—for which we are inadequately staffed and organized."

"Students misunderstand our intentions as well as our functions. More and more often, students reject the ideas of disciplined accomplishment in school and society. They prefer to feel rather than think, regard their emotions and personal comfort and pleasure as more important now than any possible circumstances in the future. Their short-range view is reinforced by mass thinking, mass media, and often by their elders. Making the best of the moment has superseded making the best of themselves for the future."

There was this one teacher who thought otherwise:

"Note: I find pupils very little different from what they were 25 years ago, when they were not brainwashed by their elders into thinking they were different."

Teachers Tell about Others

When teachers were asked to name the group that most misunderstands them, they were given a list of groups from which to choose, but also were given the option—"or pick your own." Many did, and here are some of the additional groups named with the comments the teachers made.

1

High school counselors:

"Counselors are woefully isolated from the faculty and really are not in a position to counsel."

"They forget what it is like to be a teacher. They feel they are the only ones who understand and know what's best for the child. They could hardly wait to get out of the classroom, and suddenly once they are out, they know just how things should be done. They make the teacher's job much more difficult and do little to aid the student."

"Counselors tend to forget when they were in the classroom. They never seem to think the teacher understands the child better than they. They discuss the teachers with the students and side with the students. But the classroom teacher knows more about the student than the counselor ever will know. Counseling is the dumping ground for poor teachers who wanted to get out of the classes into an easy job. If the counselors had to teach half-days and reduce the class load for the rest of us, it would help the students more."

"They do a superficial job. They're gushers. They get paid for doing nothing. On the other hand, they could be most influential in helping students if they had the ability."

2

"The general public":

"People who are not teachers fail to appreciate the multifaceted job we have. We must plan our curriculum, prepare materials and tests, select textbooks, get concepts across to students and evaluate their understanding and progress, maintain an agreeable classroom climate and order, etc. There are interruptions. We have to keep current in our field. Many evenings and weekends must be spent on the work. The job is endless."

"We have done a poor job of communicating to all the public the need to understand why so many students are now rebelling and turning off the rational analysis. More 'law and order' cannot take the place of understanding what motivates youth's rebellion. Indeed, it can only make them more frustrated or turn them into zombies."

"People in general think teaching is a 'racket'. It certainly isn't. A good teacher is under a self-created strain by constantly questioning—'Am I doing a good job?' and 'Am I giving my students something that will help them in life, not merely in school?' "

"Teachers are considered second-class citizens by people in general. In Russia, I read that teaching is the most highly respected profession."

3

College professors of education:

"They don't realize a teacher works with human beings, not machines."

"College professors are dangerous because they frequently finish high school, undergraduate school, master's, doctorates, and additional schooling. So prepared, they are 'experts'. They make decisions, policy, write curricula, form public opinion, and generally influence education. Yet they have never been in the classroom and base their 'expertise' on 'book learning'."

"Unless they have been teaching in the American high school in the last five years, they have nothing to offer in the way of educational leadership. These people don't really understand the adolescent of the sixties and the seventies—or that the old methods, motivations, values are meaningless. The permissive method has proven to be for the birds. It's an entirely new ball game and they don't know the pitch."

"Too often, education professors deal with ideal situations which do not exist in the average classroom. It is easy to see why first-year teachers become disillusioned."

4

There were comments about political extremists, the first being "right wing nuts":

"They think teachers are out to undermine the morals of the nation's youth."

Next, members of the John Birch Society:

"Questioning and free play are deemed Communistic, and rote drill is American. Ultimately, they do not understand that life and learning are a continuum of experience, that each individual is unique, and this contributes to the whole to make life what it is. There is no one way to educate all the members of any group, and education happens only when an individual child chooses to let it happen."

Finally, "political leftists":

"They decry the lack of accountability but are themselves unaccountable to the point of solipsism."

5

Next, a group labeled "nonteachers":

"I was told by a brilliant, wealthy chemical engineer that any man who chooses a career in education could not be successful in any other profession and that women simply have few other choices."

"Most do not understand the frustration a teacher faces today with the parent attitude of nonresponsibility and the student attitude of hostility."

"Even my family and friends just don't believe that there is any work to teaching and don't understand why I have homework every night and weekend. They seem to think that a teacher stands in front of a class and spouts lectures which come naturally; that a teacher doesn't have to worry about individual students; that all a teacher's preparation and grading can be magically taken care of during the generous one-hour preparation period each day (which they also think is used mainly or only for coffee-drinking and chatter), and that grades are given as easily as flipping a coin."

6
Businessmen (and businesswomen):

"They think we work only six hours a day and have three months' paid vacation."

"They think we are overpaid and not very bright or we wouldn't be teaching school—and they may be right about that last point."

"This group feels that there should be some quick, effective unfailing method of measuring the worth of a teacher.

"They want this 'accountability' fed into a computer or measured in dollars or cents. They want it to be measured as a 'product' as doctors are measured in terms of patients they cure or bury. Thiscannot be done.

"Who is to measure the worth of a teacher or when is he to be measured? Should he be held accountable for the nonreaders who come from broken homes or dens of TV-watchers?

"Who is to measure the power of an inspiring teacher, one who promotes feelings of genuine accomplishment, creativity, zest for living, self-understanding? How can a computer spew forth this information? Students sometimes realize only years later which of their teachers offered them the best guidance, the most useful information, often when they were unwilling to take it.

"Who is to measure? The administrators who cannot witness teacher performance? Students with myopic sight because of their ignorance of what life will demand? Parents who go on faulty reports of students who naturally pass the buck? Other teachers who if a merit pay scale is the result, would downgrade their fellow workers?

"I am a conscientious teacher, but if I had it to do over again, I probably would never enter education."

7
"Noneducated laborers":

"Most of them feel that a person who does not work with his hands and back does not deserve to earn a decent living."

8
Courts:

"The courts do not understand the problems of education. Example: A judge ordered a school to reinstate a student who had been expelled because he had brought a pistol to school and shot another student five times. The courts claimed that his absense from school was contributing to his delinquency."

9
Supervisors:

"They sit behind a desk in an air-conditioned office and have nothing better for teachers to do than to call meeting after meeting at 4 p.m., forcing teachers to drive miles to attend after spending a long day teaching in a room not air-conditioned. My supervisor has never taught history, yet she tells me how."

10
Other teachers:

"At base, teachers misunderstand themselves. We underestimate student responsibility, maturity, and ability. We act in fear—we fear encounter with students, bury ourselves in negotiations, grievances, curriculum recommendations, book ordering, Digitek blackening (No. 2 pencil, please), and in general forget our first interest, the student, and hide behind our desks in fear and/or complacency.

"We misunderstand the student because we don't understand what it is that will make life viable for ourselves. We don't understand ourselves, what fulfills us. We're a pretty unthinking unconscious group who can't understand why students don't think.

"In my first participation in the teaching profession, I find my colleagues unimaginative, petty, paranoid, materialistic, afraid and slow to move, unemotional. At this point, I can't accept the rationale that I've gotten that 'that's life'."

11
"Some Negroes":

"They want to make up their own rules for discipline and procedures. They feel they are being discriminated against when in reality they are not."

12
Northern Congressmen and Northern Senators:

"Even when court orders caused a great disruption in the lives of everyone connected with schools, teachers in the South have tried to teach all to the best of their ability. The teachers in this area are retiring early, are quitting teaching whenever possible, and nearly all think public education is rapidly dying. The people responsible for it grossly misunderstand not only teachers but also learners and the whole education process."

13
"Black students misunderstand Black teachers":

"My Black students do not accept my set of rules for the class. They seem to want favors. Often one of them will tell me to tell 'Whitey' what to do first. They consider and sometimes call me 'Sister Tom'."

14
And finally, this comment from a teacher who must have felt so totally misunderstood, he named the group as "everyone"; and then proceeded to an example for just about every group on the original list:

"The legislature recently passed legislation very damaging to teachers. A board member said he believed teachers are underworked and overpaid. Parents side with their children and undermine the teacher's image. In our schools, principals too often side with students. Our superintendent believes that if there is a disagreement between teacher and student, the teacher is automatically wrong. And taxpayers take out their frustrations on the school budget."

15
Some teachers disagreed with the question asking for identification of a group which most misunderstands teachers. The remarks went like this:

"No complaints, really. I love my job and it seems to love me."

"I do not feel misunderstood by anyone. I feel appreciated."

"I just don't feel misunderstood, at least not any more than anyone else in any other line of work."

"Who says teachers are misunderstood? I think teachers misunderstand parents, and are too quick to blame parents for everything."

"Are teachers misunderstood? A self-pitying complaint which I think mostly invalid. Schools share the blame for this by promising or offering to be all things to all people, undertaking to do more than they are qualified to do, or authorized, or funded, or equipped, or justified in trying to do."

"This question seems to assume a certain amount of paranoia on the part of teachers. All jobs and professions are misunderstood by some people in all other positions, I presume. I know, for example, that I cannot completely understand the problems of doctors or any other group of which I am not a member. I think your question is 'loaded' and that your responses will therefore show teachers in a worse light than is true."

Given the intensity of some of those statements, we did a special count to determine how many of the 2,692 respondents thought likewise–i.e., that teachers are not misunderstood. Just 19 teachers–7/10ths of 1%–made that statement. Another 15% did not give any answer to the question, while 84% did name a "most-misunderstanding" group and explained their choice.

TEACH-POLL drew numerous personal comments added by the teachers. Usually, they were some variation of "Thanks for the opportunity to talk" and "This was great! Thanks" and "Thanks for the opportunity to voice my opinion; you're the first to ask."

There was one "As usual, this is a poor questionnaire."

And there was another–you might call it the most moving one of all–that said:

> "Please forgive the writing. This was completed driving on
> the highway between Bozeman and Billings, Montana."

Teachers Tell about the "Worst" Parents

THE QUESTION WAS:

"Think of the worst parent with whom you've had any dealings. What made that person so poor?"

Here is a selection of individual quotations from the answers:

1

Teachers considered these parents "worst" because they were against their own children:

"He condemned his son for everything he did, then condemned the teacher for not being able to straighten out a boy who had no constructive help at home. This father hated even himself."

"He told his son frequently that he was worthless."

"The worst parent sided in with those criticizing his child and left the child standing alone and condemned on every side. Under even the worst conditions, the child should still be able to count on his parents for their love and loyalty."

"He was a war veteran who regretted that he had made the country safe for his long-haired son."

"He constantly pressured his daughter about deciding on her career, even though she was only a junior in high school. He jeered at and ridiculed her friends publicly."

"Worst parents are the ones you don't dare send notices to because they will punish or restrict kids who already have had their self-esteem destroyed by too much of this in the past. They have taught their kids that they are no good and stupid and then punish them for being that way. You feel a need to protect children from this treatment."

"I have a very disturbed little boy in a small advanced class. When it became necessary to inform the parents that he was not doing satisfactory academic work, the father came to see me. He insisted that the boy be there. I never again wish to be party to such an exhibition of belittling terrorism as that father demonstrated. I defended the child as best I could, but I had the feeling that all I had done was furnish the father with fuel he needed for the continuing trial-by-fire this child endured."

"He was very suspicious of his daughter and her boyfriend. They were having a relatively innocent courtship. The father spied on her at school (had the principal open her locker so he could search it), kept her away from school functions so she couldn't see her boyfriend, etc. Her school work deteriorated. The father mentioned the fact that the daughter was adopted and had 'a bad beginning'."

And there were more of the same:

"They neglected my calls for assistance, berated the child for being stupid, then urged the child to quit school in favor of the military or a job, all this while drunk at a conference at their home."

"She told me, 'I feel sorry for you having to have my son two periods in a row. He's not very smart.' "

"He would belittle his child because he felt the child's inability was a reflection of his own abilities."

"The mother of two of my female students really degrades her daughters, almost making them out to be the town streetwalkers. As a result, one of the girls quit school (not because she had to), and the other is barely hanging in. Both are of above-average intelligence."

"He had no interest in the boy, frequently told him he was a constant trouble, himself spent every night in a bar but told the boy to stay in the apartment and have no company. When the boy got in trouble with the law, the parents appeared in court and insisted the judge put the boy in a reformatory because he was 'no good and never would be.' "

"The parent in a conference with me said, 'I gave up on that kid a long time ago. He's a troublemaker.' "

"The worst parent I've ever known tried to ignore the fact that his child existed. He was in bad shape as a human being—divorced, living with another woman whose son he ignored, too."

2

Other parents are more interested in themselves than in their children:

"The worst parents are those who don't give a damn, who foist their own hang-ups on already confused kids, who kick their kids out of the house and then scream that they are unloved by ungrateful children."

"They cared only for themselves and their social standing, not the feelings of their children."

"The worst are those who lie to protect themselves, so they (the parents) are not made the fool."

"The parent was concerned about the prestige her child's success would bring, not about the child for the child's sake."

"He took the inability of his offspring to achieve as a reflection of his own ability."

"Fear of her child's failure and the reflected social stigma made one mother a literal neurotic tigress snapping at the entire school system."

3

The pride of the parents played a large part:

"They were more concerned with their own pride than with what was right for their child."

"He wanted desperately for the child to be good at the things important to the parent, with no regard for the child's interests or abilities. The child grew up feeling rejected, ashamed, and with no self-worth."

"She was concerned only that her child succeed for appearance' sake. Looking like something was more important than being something. She was a good example of materialistic Americana."

"He was using the kid as a token of his own ego. If the kid got bad grades, it made him (the father) look bad. If he didn't get into a good college, the father would suffer a loss of status. The boy had an aggregate SAT score of 1000 and the father was outraged that I had discouraged his son from applying to Harvard, Princeton, or Yale."

4

And many worst parents just do not have time for their children:

"He never could find time to invest in his child's future."

"Too busy working, and not home. When home, didn't care."

"The worst parents are the nonparents, parents in name only."

"The child was just an afterthought. If they had time for him, okay, if not, he could exist without them. They were parents in name only, no respect, no communication, no trust in each other, they just lived under the same roof."

"After her son was failing and it was too late, she finally was able to break away from work for an hour to find out why. Then she said, 'you just can't control these young people these days, can you?' "

"She wouldn't talk with me about her son's lack of attendance and refusal to do any work. She told me not to bother her, she didn't have time to waste on him and I shouldn't bother, either."

"The worst parent showed no interest or concern for his child. He wanted me to punish his child at any time. I felt that this was his responsibility, but he told me he didn't have time."

"This parent was always asleep when the student went to school without breakfast each morning. She was never home in the evening and seldom saw her son. Her only answer when told he was in trouble at school and with the police was 'You'll have to straighten him out up there. I can't do a thing with him.' "

"The time you are willing to give your children is the most direct expression of your love. Invariably, the worst parents do not have time for their youngsters ever. They push them out from the beginning. No time of interest in answering questions. No time for quiet, loving companionship. Social life too organized to be home with children at night. Not really knowing where and with whom children are. Use of 'things' to bribe children not to make demands on their time."

"They didn't have time to be concerned until the 'kid' was 20-years-old and still not graduated. They didn't know what he was taking in school or wanted to do after school. They didn't know he is into drugs and soon will be engulfed by them. They do know he's working part-time, but do not realize he puts in 30 hours a week for money to support his kicks. And they call the teachers to ask why we didn't pass the boy."

5

Some "worst" parents have no love or cannot express their love for their children, the teachers declared:

"He didn't like his own kid."

"He was one of those people who made jokes about his own children."

"She didn't care for the child and regarded her as a burden."

"The worst parent didn't express or prove her concern for her child. When she accompanied her husband abroad and about the country on lectures and to conventions, the child suffered greatly from loneliness and lack of love."

"She did not really care about her child, and that is the worst crime of all."

"The father wasn't able to listen to what the child was saying, especially when he (the father) was angry. He wasn't willing to help the son with transportation for extracurricular events, and had absolutely no interest in the boy's activities. All this destroyed what love could have grown in the boy."

"He sought help from school officials but tried to extract from them promises such as 'don't tell him I called and asked you to help. Dream up some other reasons.' In other words, 'don't tell him I care.' "

"I called a parent to disclose her son's failing in class, his bitter attitude about school, etc. Result: She yelled over the phone at me for waking her up."

"He showed no interest in the well-being of a very fine son. He was almost devoid of feeling. The son needed and wanted the love of his father."

6

These parents were so poor because they were so overprotective, the TEACH-POLL respondents said:

"They wouldn't let the student make his own decisions."

"All the written work that was handed in was done by the parent. The boy could neither read nor write."

"She lied for the child in covering up truancies."

"She never allowed her child any freedom within the home. He couldn't sit down and read when he wanted to, and couldn't do a science experiment unless she watched his every move."

"The totally permissive parents who feel their little boy has had a rough life, and they must never say 'no' to him."

"He taught his child to despise him by lying, cheating, and covering for him at school whenever the child was in trouble. He never taught the child to be independent and to reason intelligently rather than emotionally."

"She has a rotten spoiled kid who rides through school on his mother's alibis."

"The parents who made every decision for their son, even to the extent of Mom going to college with him and helping him register."

"She wanted her daughter to stay with her forever, to be submissive and eternally respectful to her, and never to stop being a baby girl. She virtually destroyed her by making her a grossly inadequate adult who is still, at age 25, her baby girl."

"A bright boy I taught two years ago had a father who was too strict. The boy quit school and joined the service because his father refused to let him date girls in his senior year. Today he flies a helicopter but when he comes home, his father won't trust him with the family car. He plans to go to college when he gets out, and I feel he will turn out OK but without a father."

And there were additional ones:

"The parent saw to it her child took all easy courses so she could be in the honor society."

"He tried to be a buddy to his daughter, talk her language, and dress 'hip'. He also rationalized every move she made and had an excuse for everything. She had the attitude, 'Daddy will take care of everything.' "

"The worst parent I have ever had to deal with was a woman who dominated the life of her only child, a son. There was no father, so the woman went unchecked in devouring the poor kid. She often met him at the corner of the street across from school and walked him home—just a few blocks. The Sunday morning the names of new Key Club inductees appeared in the local paper, my phone rang at 7 a.m.; Mrs. X was demanding to know why her son had been overlooked. In short, she was living his life, and ruining it in the process."

"The worst mother I ever had dealings with had too much sympathy for her son. What he needed was a good spanking instead of sympathy for his 'invented' chronic illnesses."

"He manipulated and enslaved his child and was a dictator. Worst of all, the poor idiot father was and still is a teacher."

7

These parents were identified as worst because of their rigidity and lack of ability to communicate:

"He was so rigid and so didactic he shut off completely the channels of communication. He finally threw his long-haired 16-year-old son out of the house. His daughters are fearful 'yes' people."

"He was once a Nazi officer and still acts like one in personal relationships."

"He refused to listen to a word anyone had to say. He condemned both teacher and child. No one was any good."

"He sees a Communist plot in most events, and in all books of fiction written since 1900. He is frightened, belligerent, and ill-informed. He also is energetic and ambitious—a formidable antagonist."

"The worst attitude in a parent is the idea that the child can and must learn a certain body of facts so he can get into college."

"The parent felt there was only one correct way to teach English."

"He was completely close-minded. He was a super political and social conservative with a deep conviction that 'God is on my side.' "

"This parent also was a teacher. Any methods contrary to her own were doomed to failure."

"Everything should be done like it was 30 years ago when he was in school."

"They felt the only value in learning anything is a money value. They found literature, drama, poetry all worthless and were highly verbal about it."

"He wanted me to report every single infraction of any rule by his child and punish the child the same way he would. I simply couldn't."

8

These parents used physical violence on their student sons and daughters:

"He maintained that the best way to deal with his son's lack of academic achievement was to beat him into submission. His brutality and oversimplification explained much of the passivity and apathy of the son."

"Wished his child had never been born, and released his own feelings of inadequacy by beating the child, providing no food or shelter for her and in no way recognized her as a human."

"She blamed the teachers for not making her son go to class. She said she 'beat him up' but he still failed to go. She kicked him out of the house for not going."

"His method was physical force. I didn't enjoy teaching a bruised child."

"He felt that the teacher should discipline his son to the extent of 'standing the boy against the wall and beating the hell out of him.' I told him that was his job, not mine, and maybe he (the father) should be stood against the wall and have this idea beat out of him."

9
Teachers thought these parents were worst because they were overpermissive:

"This was a parent who had given complete permissiveness, who didn't want his children to have to sacrifice as he had and so the children had no sense of values or respect for people, rights, or property."

"They bought off judges and tried to prevent us from making their child abide by school regulations. These things showed how little love they really had for their son."

"Unbelievably permissive. School and teachers always wrong, her children always right. Two of her three children now have prison records."

"A very permissive, neurotic mother whose husband was afraid to disagree with her adamant unyielding defense of the student. This young man had no adult he respected to model his emotional development. He was totally devoid of any self-discipline or sense of personal responsibility."

"This father had many people who worked for him. He told me he expected them to be at work on time. His boy was tardy to home room three or four times a week. After one semester of this, I tied his tardiness to his grade and his father became furious when I told him I believed the son needed the training in punctuality and it would stand him in good stead when the boy got a job."

10
These parents were worst, the teachers said, because they set poor examples for their children:

"He lied constantly in front of his children, then wondered why they did the same."

"After meeting him, I know why his daughter is a 'bitch'. She takes after her father."

"The parent was lazy, unkempt, radical, hardheaded, and atheistic."

"He gave no guidelines for tolerance, patience, or a sense of belonging. His children had no convictions about God. He let them grow as 'weeds' and did not talk with his children but left notes on mirrors, bulletin boards, etc."

11
Money was a factor in these cases:

"The worst parent I ever knew was a corporation type who, when apprised his child wouldn't graduate, blamed the school for not informing him earlier (deficiency notices had often been sent home) and wanted to know how much it would cost him to have her graduate."

"He was very strict in principle but not example. He gave plenty of things but little of himself to the child."

"Money for every whim was available. His children were not allowed to work for anything."

"She gave her son too much freedom and a car."

"The worst was the parent whose child's grades were slipping because of his overpowering devotion to his new car, and who responded that 'it would just cause a fuss' to deprive the child of use of the car for a time."

"Her husband had died and she had remarried to a man who despised her son. She tried to make up for his lack of love by buying her son gifts—a boat, a motorcycle, etc. Horrible! What he really needed was responsibility for something that he would work for on his own. She never gave him a chance."

"The daughter, a junior in high school, had been cutting classes and being truant. The mother gave the daughter money for a two-week trip to Florida—during school time. After returning, the daughter proceeded to run away from home because she was so far behind in her school work."

"This mother remarked that her daughter really didn't need her, as only money was necessary for the care of children these days."

"The worst parents hire tutors and think this solves all problems."

12
Some parents can be belligerent to the point of intimidation:

"He was so insecure he shouted and used profane language before attempting to learn what really had happened."

"He was absolutely belligerent to think I had criticized his child."

"She used shouting as an offensive weapon."

"This mother believed without question every distorted lie her child told her. She'd call me on the phone and curse and swear without once asking for an explanation."

"He was belligerent and coarse. He would not listen, came in with preconceived ideas, swore, threatened. His combination of stupidity and ignorance was almost impossible to get through. He finally pulled his daughter (a prostitute at the time) out of school because I had kept her after school for repeated lateness (a school rule)."

"He called me on the phone and threatened to beat me up because he didn't like the way I had talked to his son. The big problem with this experience was that the man refused to identify himself and as a result I'm still not sure whom I offended."

13

Not all dropping out of school is the student's idea:

"The worst parent I ever knew was a father who took his child out of school when the child had the greatest desire to stay and graduate. The parents wanted the student to go to work and support the mother who liked her wine."

"This father wanted me to discourage his sons in their desire to obtain a higher education. He wanted them to stay home and harvest timber for him."

14

These parents thought they were smarter than the teachers:

"The worst are the pushy ones. The ones who think they know more about your subject than you do."

"One who has his nose in our business all the time."

"He told me it was none of my business if his child wanted to be a miserable failure in school."

"He's the one who said 'If my son talks back to you, it's because you need it.' "

"He was my superintendent. He never made any mistakes. His kids were born perfect and never did anything wrong. There are two chairs in the Hereafter; he will sit in one and God will sit in the other."

"The worst one held a wild, irrational, unseeing, logic-tight refusal to try to see what I was trying to do."

"She lost her temper easily, came to conferences with her mind made up, and was closed to any suggestions or outside interference."

"The worst can be the undereducated person who feels that even though he had little or no education, he is able to earn more than the educated teacher."

"The worst can be the overeducated person (PhD) who feels that no one else can do the job properly."

15
Sex was a factor with these parents:

"He calls the school board and yells when sex education or abortion is mentioned."

"Her constant fear was that of her daughter getting pregnant, because she herself had to get married."

"She was convinced I was an immoral woman and was trying to corrupt my students for teaching 'Man of La Mancha'."

"The worst was an unwed mother with six school children. The children were never encouraged to spend any time at home as their mother was usually entertaining 'guests'. One of the children mentioned 'I don't have a home, I just live in a house.' These children are all capable students but due to the family situation, their educational background is poor and all are in or have been in remedial classes and schools."

16
Race was a factor in these cases:

"She was hostile. She did not believe a white teacher could teach her black child."

"She resented me not as a teacher, not because I was young, but because of my skin color."

"A black mother who contended her son would not have failed had he been white."

"It was a mother who believed the biggest liar I have ever met (her daughter). She lectured me on my lack of training and moral rectitude. (A black 'racist' she was.)"

"Being a member of a minority group, this parent hated me. This hang-up does nothing to help the child."

"The worst parent yelled 'discrimination' when her son did not make high marks in a class when he did well to even pass."

"With pious vigilance, she watched for any sign of school corruption of her children's morals by reading deep, dark meanings into every class discussion and choice of reading material. For example, she objected to our reading *The Scarlet Letter* and to our discussion of its contemporary application. She also objected to our reading minority-group literature, and to a film narrated by Bill Cosby concerning Black history and literature. For such a pious Christian, she was the most prejudiced bigot I have ever met!"

17

These parents tried to "pull rank":

"In my music program, the child was removed because she didn't get the part the parent thought their name should receive."

"He is a member of the board of education and has attempted to use his position to change a failing grade given to his daughter."

"Air Force officers who generally feel the rank on base gives them special attention off base. They never check personally with you but always through your superior. As a result, you have conferences with your principal over failure notices. That doesn't do the children any good."

"He was a professor who felt his children were exempt from school rules, who was rude to teachers, who sided with his children before learning the teacher's side, and who tried to pull rank. He was sarcastic, rude, pompous, and very antagonistic."

18

Some parents qualify for a "worst" rating because they feel their children are always right:

"The parents always defended the son, regardless of the infraction. The boy, big for his age, could have taken most of it in his stride, but was cheated of this privilege to grow up."

"The parent whose son would not lie, cheat, or steal—but he did all three."

"They think the student can do no wrong and will back the student, right or wrong."

"She defended her son in everything he did; therefore, he was the most maladjusted boy in school and constantly in trouble."

"He was a school board member and he accepted his child's version of an incident without acknowledging even the possibility that it might not be the truth."

"This parent always knew more about the school than the staff members. He would never take a teacher's word over his child's and even lied and made excuses for his child when the student was clearly in the wrong."

"He was a 'Johnny could never do anything wrong' parent. It was always the school's fault."

"He was ignorant, unwilling to listen, contentious, argumentative, biased, bigoted. He resented teachers. His son could do no wrong, so I must have been picking on the poor little boy. What a disagreeable experience this was."

"She made herself a committee of one to evaluate every teacher. Her children were always right, the teacher always wrong. She never came to school to find out the teacher's side of any misunderstanding."

"She thought her little darling hung the moon."

19

Many parents cannot properly gauge the abilities of their children, and pressure the students too hard for unrealistically high grades:

"The worst parent I've contacted is an engineer with a PhD who pressures his child for all A's and who makes her miserable when she gets a B-plus in French."

"The worst was a woman who demanded top grades so her son would qualify for a scholarship although he made no attempt to complete his assignments or participate in the classroom."

"This parent wanted the child to make better grades than she was capable of doing. She hounded the child and me until I almost felt like giving the grade to get her off the child's back. She made a nervous wreck of the child."

"His son had an IQ of 57, but the father refuses to believe his son cannot excel academically and insists he is going to college to make up for the fact that both father and mother were high school dropouts."

"She wanted her brain-damaged child to stay in the most demanding academic program. She would lock him in his room at night to study."

"His son had a low IQ and I refused permission for him to take Algebra I. His father was furious; he was an engineer and his son was going to be an engineer."

"She insisted her son take all college prep courses, even though she knew he didn't have the ability. She made him come in after school and do extra work and had it sent home for her study. The boy was a nervous wreck and ended up running away from home and joining the hippies."

There were a great many comments about this kind of parent. Here are some more:

"This mother refused to believe her child was incapable of performing on a college entrance level. She planned to punish him by taking away all the things he valued and refusing to let him be a guidance counselor at a summer boys camp. She was ashamed of the child and the fact that he was slower than some others."

"That parent was so demanding of this child of average ability that the child almost had a nervous breakdown and was sorely tempted to cheat to make the good grades. The parent threatened to take away privileges if A's were not made."

"He felt his son should achieve at a given level without regard for the boy's abilities or interests. He said my boy will do thus and such because I, the father, say so."

"The worst is the one who pushes an unaccomplished child and tries to make him something he cannot hope to be. It is all right to push the brilliant, but pushing the average, or below, leads to tragedy."

"Their attitude was that 'My child is supreme. He must make high grades and may do or say anything he wishes without correction; otherwise, I'll make trouble.' "

"I discovered one of my finest boys weeping in the hall afraid to go home. After a whole semester of strenuous effort, he had gotten only a C-plus in chemistry. His parents both expected him to enter medical school and had set up an impossible batch of hurdles for him."

20

Some "worst" parents, thought their students didn't have to do the same work all other students were required to do:

"He told his child that if he didn't want to do the work in class, he didn't have to."

"The assumption that because his child was not satisfied with the assignments and criticisms and instruction she was given, she should not have to do the work (which was designed to strengthen her shortcomings in English skills)."

"This student has been rewarded for refusing to work. I feel sorry for him. He could be so much if his parents expected him to be instead of placing a defensive wing about him when what he really needs is a push in the posterior."

"The most obnoxious lady who spent half an hour explaining to me why her daughter didn't have to do what all my students had to do."

"She expected grades to be given for looks rather than effort and learning."

"The mother felt her son should be allowed to do as he pleased about most everything, particularly about attending school and following school rules. He was an athlete, and she felt he should be allowed to participate in athletics whether he attended school regularly or not."

"He wanted his son to be given rewards and grades without earning them. He would not let the boy accept responsibility for his behavior. He made an emotional cripple of the boy."

21

These parents were "worst" because they supported or excused cheating on the part of their sons or daughters:

"One who expected me to pass his senior son after the son had cheated on a paper. In front of his son, the father said that cheating is a way of American life. I disagree."

"He made it easy for his child to lie, cheat, etc., by setting a good example doing the same thing."

"He defended his daughter's cheating by virtue of the fact that he 'got through school by cheating, too.' Furthermore, he and his wife got hold of my private telephone number and harassed my family via phone until the police stepped in. The basic problem was that they would not believe the psychiatrist's report that they were pushing their daughter beyond her ability."

"She had helped her boy forge a paper and then complained because the teacher watched the boy after catching him cheating on a final exam. She thought being in society made her family special, but the kids were all messed up and depended on drugs."

"Despite the fact she could read her son's paper and also the book he copied it from, she denied that he'd copied."

"Her child had cheated on a test, failed it, and the father was notified. He came to see me and threatened me physically. He screamed vulgarities at me and blocked my exit from the room. Rather than explore the reasons his daughter needed to cheat, he vented his frustrations on a 'civil servant,' as he called me."

22

Some parents want to shift the responsibility entirely to the school:

"She said she was paying tuition, the rest was up to the school."

"He said the school should take complete charge of his son for seven hours a day and should require no involvement on the part of the parent to successfully mold his son into a normally intelligent young adult."

"She regrets that school does not last all day and all year."

"They couldn't handle their son so made the school the scapegoat."

"To him, school is a place to send his kids eight hours a day to get them off his hands."

"She didn't know what she was complaining about, she only knew her children weren't growing up right. She blamed the school for all her own inadequacies."

23

Many parents blame the school and its faculty for anything and everything that goes wrong with their children:

"She believed all teachers to be plotting against her child."

"She was very biased, resentful, and belligerent and did not believe her child was capable of any type of maladaptive behavior. She had a completely unrealistic view of his potential and performance. She was very rude and sarcastic to me, and in a very supercilious manner accused me of being inept. Of course, she'd never passed eighth grade."

"They accused me of being a Communist and pressed for a school board investigation of my social and political life."

"He constantly criticized teachers. He said, 'I can't wait for my son to get out of your class, you have killed his interest.' "

"I have never met the parents of one boy I have this year, but they must be the worst. This student has been suspended four times, arrested several times, and received four Fs last quarter. The father appeared before the school board and accused the system for the trouble his son was in. The basis of his accusation was that we allowed boys to wear their hair long. His son has a butch."

"She was a professional woman and determined her son was going to pass, no matter what. Learning that I was a first-year teacher, she immediately assumed that I was 'practicing' and incompetent. I feel she had a guilt complex because she worked and was not spending enough time with her children."

"One father raved on for 45 minutes about the poor educational system, inferior teachers, lack of memorizing as a way of studying, and never acknowledged his daughter's own refusal to take notes, pay attention, turn in assigned work, and study."

"I sent notices to the parent about the student's failure. No answer. So I telephoned. The mother yelled 'you bitch, you should not even be a teacher' at me."

And there were many more:

"He said 'I never met a teacher who was capable of holding any other job.' Of course, his son's attitude was the same."

"At open house, she gave me the third degree about whether I was one of those 'new' teachers who did nothing but play records, etc. Later she questioned assigned work and complained that I expected too much and gave too much homework, and that I made the child nervous."

"She said if I couldn't handle her son, I shouldn't be teaching. All the while she knew her son was a discipline case because of personal problems. The only thing the boy seemed to respect was physical violence, which I couldn't and wouldn't use."

"He treated you like a third-class citizen, dirt, untouchable, beneath him."

"His pettiness made him find fault with everything the school tried to do. He was a complete fool."

"I feel very sorry for the little fellows who hear from their parents that the school and teachers are unfair, unreasonable, play favorites, and always are wrong. Such overprotectiveness."

"The worst were the ones who bitched and griped about all teachers and schools in front of their children."

"Daily he informed his children that education was not important and teachers were dumb."

"They felt the schools were monsters trying to eat up poor Johnny."

"She felt her child could do no wrong, and that teachers were the only ones who made mistakes."

"When I tried to discuss her son's poor school work, she said 'your job is to teach him. I did my part, I bore him.' She felt her responsibilities were over once she had given birth."

24

Finally, there were these additional parents whom teachers classified as "worst":

"He didn't have the least idea what went on in his child's head even though he thought he was a model parent because he forced his son to go to church every Sunday and get a haircut."

"The worst is the one who misunderstood an assignment given her child. She called me and didn't ask what was going on, just started yelling horrible things. Her child came to school embarrassed and then quit for two weeks. Before the mother was through, she had called the school board, superintendent, and principal. She never apologized and never suffered for it. Only her children were left to do that."

"The worst parent I ever saw was a teacher herself. She was a dominating, loudmouthed, swaggering woman, so sure of herself and so sure her little Johnny could do no wrong. When she was made to admit her son's apathy and disruptive behavior, she tried to justify it by his age and personality, presenting a demonstrative skit on-the-spot of all the antics she knew he engaged in—slouching in his chair, looking at the girls' legs, constantly talking, and running around. By the time she left, I didn't need to ask her what her son's problem was. She was it."

"She went back and forth from complete indifference to smothering blind love. The child was very confused and insecure."

"I had failed a student for receiving all failing marks and for cheating. She made no attempt to obtain help even though I encouraged her to see me. The following semester, her mother ran into me in the hall. She was obviously 'high'. She screamed at me and called me a 'racist bitch'. She told me she was going to beat me up. She would not allow me to say a word. She literally chased me into the faculty lounge where several policemen happened to be sitting and continued to swear and threaten me."

"She was a high school teacher who was greatly upset because we said the pledge of allegiance in Spanish, and she felt it was unAmerican and that we were pledging allegiance to the Mexican government."

"She wouldn't look at her child's test results because she didn't believe in tests (she said she took one once which said she'd make a good truck driver, which wasn't far from being true)."

"The worst was the one who called at 4:30 the afternoon JFK was shot and spent 45 minutes demanding to know why her daughter received an incomplete."

"One year the worst parent I ever knew gathered his son's friends at his home and helped them plan ways to harass the dean of boys at school."

"He's interested only in 'why didn't my boy make all-state quarterback?' Sports first, second, and third. 'The only reason for school is the weekly entertainment for the community and my boy had better play. . . .' "

"The father was totally selfish, and to make this worse, he was impulsive, thoughtless, and ignorant. When his daughter was 13, he raped her and gave her a son."

25

And this last teacher comment, with the wish that life really could be that simple:

"The mother was called in by my request. Her son was an unruly discipline problem. She did not give me an opportunity even to state the problem; she just asked for my horoscope sign and said, 'Say no more. Everyone knows that a Capricorn and a Libra can never get along. It's not your fault or his, it's just the stars.' She then turned around and walked out, fully satisfied that the problem was solved."

26

There were some generalized comments about seeing parents:

"I have not met a parent at my school who I really think is great. The PTA program is close to nothing, and the parents I have met have not turned me on."

"Great parents? I guess I haven't run across any of these yet."

"The great parents must be hiding. I never see them."

And there were many who reported:

"We don't see parents."

"I have not met any parents of my students."

"In four years of teaching, I have only talked about 15 minutes to parents."

"I have had almost no contact with parents. Our guidance department handles all that."

One teacher approved of this kind of situation:

"At the junior and senior high level, I find that there is very little contact with parents. To me this is a very healthy situation. This seems to indicate some good self-reliant training, both at home and in the school."

More often, though, the reaction to not seeing parents was:

"The worst parent of all is the one with whom we have no contact."

CHAPTER 2

Telling It Like It Should Be

Teachers Tell about the "Best" Parents

THE QUESTION WAS:

"One way or another, you deal with the parents of many students. Think of the best parent in this group you ever knew. What made that person so great?"

Here is a selection of the individual responses:

1

What are the best parents like? These teachers said they show love:

"She reaches out first to her child."

"His love of kids."

"A loving concern, a willingness to be involved, not afraid to take a position on an important issue."

"He showed a fierce loyalty and love for his own kid."

"This father could talk openly with his daughter. He gave her rules to go by. She could reason with him, so great respect and love were visible."

"This father listened to what his kids had to say. He communicated with them. He didn't always agree; he wasn't permissive; but at least he was available. He was interested in his kids as people as well as academically."

"The fact that he cared about his child. Not only his education but his general happiness."

"They provided a good home with love."

"He liked and understood his son and listened to the boy first, then heard the teacher's side, and then privately but wisely explained to the boy why he should change his behavior. He really cared about both the present and future welfare of his son."

"She was actively involved in her daughter's activities. If her daughter's friends were in trouble, they would call the mother up, even in the middle of the night, and the mother would rush over to help. The fact that this mother cared so much, not only for her own daughter but also for all kids, and the fact that she really did something for them makes her outstanding."

"He loved his children and tried to raise them, not spawn them."

2

They were willing to take time with their children:

"This parent was never too busy, did much more than most individuals for church, school, and community, but mainly raised healthy, happy children and enjoyed doing it."

"He was willing to take time out of an already busy day to try to understand his child better. He kept a close eye on his child's successes and failures and tried to understand the 'whys' of both."

"She talked with her children. She listened to them. She laughed with them, not at them. She went to watch their ball games and school plays because she wanted to be a part of their lives."

"The wife is at home during the day. The family spends time together. The parents retain control over their child."

"He took time from his business and personal life to listen to his daughter."

"She has raised five children by herself. To her, the development of their moral character is more important than straight A's. She has worked in her home to help support her family and yet be there if her children need her. She is not an active PTA-goer, but she is doing a great job as a parent."

"He was a fine father who took time with his daughter yet left her time for her private pursuits; who did not punish her yet let her know he expected her to meet intellectual obligations as well as social and moral ones. He also worked actively and effectively for better financing for local schools."

3

The home is an important factor:

"They did their share of educating the child at home."

"There are books in the home. The parents READ."

"The home should be recognized as the most important education institution in the world."

4

Some parents become so involved they start taking part themselves:

"She took a foreign language herself in order to help her children."

"She became engaged in the work of the student, shared the reading in a poetry seminar, visited class to learn, took the student to out-of-town libraries for literature not locally available."

5

These parents were "best" because they set a good example:

"They took time to be parents, friends, and examples to their children."

"He truly loved his children and thoroughly enjoyed them. He was proud of them and respected them, so they in turn respected him and were proud of him. He was honest, open, and humble. He taught by example."

"The best parent was one who was never 'too busy' for his child. He was always aware of what was going on and trusted his child to make intelligent decisions because he had taught the child well—by example. He maintained a home where the child was a real part and never felt unwelcome."

6

Best parents, the teachers said, were consistent parents, especially when discipline was involved:

"He followed up on his promises, both as rewards and as punishment. His child respected him for being both firm and fair."

"She had a consistent love that included discipline in its proper perspective, not as an end in itself but as a means of civilizing the individual."

"They were consistent, strict, and conservative in discipline."

"A parent came to me and said 'call me when my son gives trouble and doesn't work.' I called the past grading period when he was not working and had failed, and she said: 'His father will take care of the problem tonight.' Since then, the student has settled down and is now working. It seemed one father was still head of the household."

"I particularly remember one father who put his finger directly on his son's sudden inability to turn in assignments. Revocation of his driving privileges brought an immediate improvement."

"The best parent is one who can say 'no' or 'do' and then back it up."

7

These parents promoted independence:

"He would let his child make some pretty major decisions for himself. He felt that this was the only way to teach the ability to make rational decisions and to accept responsibility for the decisions as the child grew. He was always willing to guide and discuss such decisions but not to push his feelings onto the child."

"The best parent I have ever known stayed in the background of her child's school life, encouraging and listening. Since I teach on the high school level, I have noticed that the parents who cut the umbilical cord and let their children develop independence in their studies and in their ideas did more good than all the protective ones."

8

These parents let their children be individuals:

"They accepted their child as he really is."

"This mother treated her daughter with respect for her judgment and knowledge."

"He was interested in, cared for, and accepted his son. He not only cheered his son on the B-squad basketball team but also was willing to accept the fact that the son didn't have the motivation to go into Algebra I. He wanted his son to go to college but did not push him to a goal beyond his reach."

"The best parents I know had a daughter with very limited ability. They were very happy at any progress the girl made. They let the girl and the teacher know how pleased and proud they were."

"Love and concern for the child was blessed with the proper amount of worthwhile 'neglect'. The child could breathe and be a person in his own right."

"He understood his child and his potential and accepted the potential realistically. He did not push his child to accomplish unrealistic goals."

"The parent allowed the child to be responsible on his own. She let him grow, opening the next door at the exact moment he could cope with the problems beyond it."

"He respected his child as a person and did not treat him as a child but as a 'growing adult'."

"She was the parent of one of my brightest students. This student was extremely reserved—she never volunteered anything in class. However, the parent accepted her daughter as she was. Too often, bright students' parents keep pushing them, even beyond excellence if that is possible."

"She was not ashamed to admit the child was a slow learner. She insisted the child not be promoted for physical reasons but be allowed to repeat a grade."

"It is easy to support the successful student and much more of a challenge to support the unsuccessful."

"The best parent I've known treated his son as a person, equal in the human race."

Permitting the student to be an individual also meant not insisting a son or daughter be exactly the same as the parent:

"She could understand and accept her child as an individual, not an extension of herself."

"He saw the child as an individual rather than a mirror of himself."

"That parent wanted what was best for the child, what would make him happy, not necessarily good grades or what would bring glory or satisfaction to the parent."

"He was concerned that his daughter become her own individual self without being threatened by a mold he would have preferred for her. He was willing to accept the child he had, not make her over into the one he wanted."

"Although the father wanted his son to be an athlete, he accepted the boy's decision to be a musician."

"Her recognition and graceful acceptance of the fact that her daughter—in spite of her academically inclined parents and brothers and sisters—should be encouraged in her desire to become a beautician."

"The greatest quality any parent can have is the ability to let his children grow up to be themselves and not carbon copies of the parent."

9

Good parents are sensitive to the feelings of others:

"They were not pushy and interested in class level for status. They were sensitive to the feelings of both the teacher and student."

"He understood some of the crisis his child was going through—social loneliness, insecurity, boredom with school, etc. He had a sincere grasp of what students felt for their needs of freedom, rights, and responsibilities in school."

"He was the type of person everyone should be—intelligent, compassionate, polite, sensitive, interested in many areas. He reminded me of the person idealized by the youth movements. His daughter was exactly like this father (and also the mother). Marvelous family."

"At no time did he deride or criticize either the child or the teacher."

"He did not quickly condemn or defend either me or his student, but asked for and volunteered constructive suggestions to enable both the student and me to maintain a constructive and satisfying relationship."

"She discussed and did not yell."

10

Many teachers identified "best" parents as cooperative and working with the high school faculty:

"She wanted to work with me, not against me."

"He asked me what he as a father could do to make my teaching job easier."

"Even when she disagreed with the school, she did not encourage her daughter in her dissatisfaction, but sought to know the facts, explained them to the daughter, and encouraged her to adjust to the situation."

"He wanted to know why things were done but did not try to tell us how to teach."

"He listened to teacher suggestions rather than making all the suggestions to the teacher."

"They had faith in me and realized that I knew more about my field than they did."

"They didn't blame the teacher when the child didn't get an A."

"The parents allowed me to speak first instead of reciting a previously memorized speech."

"He listened carefully to my analysis of the child's problems, and instead of refuting or ignoring my suggestions, he respected them."

"He supported the school system rather than unconsciously criticizing it in front of easily influenced children who imitate parental attitudes."

"They accepted my decision instead of playing teacher and attempting to diagnose and make their own decisions."

"They understood the teacher's problems."

"This parent backed me up as much as my principal."

"She made allowances for the fact that teachers are human and that even the best of them sometimes make mistakes."

"They were the type who take the time to get to know their child's teachers as individuals instead of seeing them only when a problem develops."

"She was once a teacher herself and knew and was sympathetic to our problems. You almost have to be an ex-teacher to be a parent who totally understands a school situation."

There are parents who help form a teaching partnership:

"He wanted what was best for his child and considered the teacher a partner in helping his child learn."

"He understood and agreed with my aims. The three of us--parent, teacher, and child--became a team."

"She dealt with teacher and student, all three of us in a group, with no discussions behind anyone's back."

"He believed that teachers were doing their job. He made the child feel that school, teachers, and rules were all working in his best interest."

"One father who obviously had good communication with his son knew the boy's grades before I showed him. His concern was to find out what to do--what together we could do--to help the boy."

"She wanted to know how we could work together to improve the student in all ways, not just grades."

11
Some parents are so concerned and involved that this has an impact on their children, too:

"She was concerned enough to visit every teacher every year for all three of her children. She offered her cooperation and solicited information regarding achievements. Her children reflected their mother's concern in the classroom."

"They take TIME to discuss school life with their children. They know their children's friends. They can and do discuss the subject matter being covered. The student feels that what he is doing is important."

"A mother and father attended an open house together. They had their child's complete program with them, along with their own notes on questions ranging from school policy to classroom behavior. They knew almost exactly the subject matter covered to date in every course. They were anxious to meet all their child's teachers as human beings. The child was proud to have this interest and attention shown in his school activities."

12
There were other teachers who chose as best those parents who apparently just approved of them as teachers:

"He backed the teacher, right or wrong."
"The best parent is the one who backs the teacher to the hilt."
"They agree with me."
"You think parents are great when they think you're a great teacher."
"Think the teacher is right always."
"The best parent is the one who never bothered me."

But there were two teachers who took a different approach:

"The best parent I ever worked with disagreed with me on points that opened my eyes to weaknesses in my teaching. He made me a better teacher."

"The best parent is the one who refuses to accept mediocre (or worse) teaching and challenges the teachers and the system when mediocrity is evidenced by the teacher."

13
These additional "best" parents were identified:

"This father didn't expect the school to make a good man of his son without any help from him. In fact, he accepted the fact that most of the job was his job, not the school's."

"Even though she was the only parent in the family, she was thoughtful, concerned, and she listened."

"She approved of her daughter's accomplishments and made the child feel complete satisfaction in knowing her parents and teacher were guiding her without making her feel pressured."

"He was a legislator concerned about education and constantly trying to help increase the money allotted to education. He has thought a great deal about teacher training and curriculum and has many sound ideas."

"They had disciplined their children at home, so when the children were reprimanded in school, it was an extension of the family and the students reacted and behaved accordingly. This family made it very easy for their children to be rewarded with an excellent education experience."

"They put their son on a study schedule, providing a tutor, and kept checking with me. He went from flunking to a B-plus."

"Her desire to assist her children in experiencing life, people, and the Lord."

"He was more concerned with his son as a person than with grades and rank at school. His most important concern was to instill values by which the son could live his life well, gaining happiness through his own integrity, not striving after false goals."

And there were these very special cases:

"They were foster parents to a hard-of-hearing boy. They were interested in learning what we taught their son, if he received training in lip-reading, whether he should go to a deaf school. They moved to another state and left him here in a fine home, as they thought it best. They were really concerned about the boy and knew him better after one year in their home than most parents know their real children."

"He was not the president of the PTA nor active in civic projects. But he did have a son with a drug problem. He worked in every way possible with me, his son, his son's counselor, the principal, and the police. Today his son is a senior and is graduating in the upper 20% of his class. I feel if his father had given up on him, he could have been lost to society."

"I had a student in a counseling section who was a holy terror. The mother came to see me several times and I visited in her home. Her husband was in prison for forgery. She had six children, was trying desperately to hold her home together. She overcame her terror of strangers to enlist help from every agency she knew to help this boy. She cooperated with us at school; she got someone to cajole him to try out Boys Club. She became active in her church and in a group of mothers on welfare. In the face of fear and desperation she tried, and helped other mothers and families as she helped her own boy."

"The best parents I ever knew were my own. When I needed good advice, I got it. When a problem arose, my mother went to the principal. My mother was fair-minded, broad-minded, and wordly-minded. In addition, she knew real values, and was a fine Bible teacher."

"The lady in a threadbare coat who said 'please don't give my boy a D and just pass him on. He is no fool and can do his work so make him earn his grade.' This was a person who knew that it is often necessary to be unkind in order to do the greatest kindness for our children."

14

These parents were chosen as best for other reasons:

"They shared my enthusiasm for a liberal education, education for the joy of it, for furniture for your mind, for playing with your brain."

"He was very understanding and gracious. His student was having a hard time in my class. He said I was doing a good job and not to worry about any more interference from his wife."

"He wanted an educated child, not merely a 'processed' one."

"He had been demanding top grades, but came to me to ask whether he was applying too much pressure at home on his 17-year-old daughter. After a long discussion, he removed the pressure. The girl's grade jumped from F to C."

"He came to me, shook my hand, told me he was interested in his child's progress and success in life, looked me in the eye and listened to what I had to say as if I had spent my life learning to help his child, wanted to, could and would. He accepted me as an ordinary human being honestly pursuing his life work. It never occurred to either of us to condemn the school system for its failure."

"The mother said you don't have to like a teacher to learn. She said the teacher does not have to be black to teach black children."

"This one parent, bless her, did not question the validity of the punishment her child received, did not ask her child "Is this true?' when I told her what had happened, and for once, did not treat me as if I had singled out her child for outrageous discrimination. And she was black."

"She knew her child was a part of the real world all day and didn't try to shelter her in the evening hours."

And there were also these:

"The best parent is the one who's never positive he is taking the best action. He's interested, concerned, and trying to do the right thing. With doubt in mind and much prayer for guidance."

"The best parent I know is a man who is the father of one of my students who also has a unique identification with teachers. He happens to be our principal."

"Both parents were great. Their boy was just an average exuberant teen-ager, a small discipline problem here and there, about a B average. But one or both parents would drop in about once a month, not only to ask about their son but also what else was happening with the school. The boy graduated but his parents still drop in on parent-teacher conference day just to say hello. People like this make it all seem worthwhile."

"The parent I most respect registered a gripe against me. The administration tried to protect me with the attitude of 'We have a fine faculty, Mr. Blank wouldn't do such a thing.' When the parent came to see me and let me know what was going on at the administration level (they hadn't notified me of the complaint), I apologized because I had 'goofed'. What griped me (and I told the principal) was that I feel there is too much dishonesty covered up in education under the guise of professionalism."

"His boy had been flying with the wrong crew, constantly in trouble, going in and out of several high schools, and wanted to quit. His father sat him down and told him that he loved him very much and would like him to finish high school, asked him to do this for him. Listening to the father talk about the boy's decision to finish, you could see the pride and love he had for his son. More parents should feel this way."

"The best parent I ever knew was never particularly pushy nor was he indifferent toward his child's education. He was totally involved in such a natural way in his own love of knowledge and maintained such an open atmosphere for expression in the home on topics of inquiry and philosophy that his children could not help developing a similar attitude. That man was my father."

"I have had many good relations with parents, but one set in particular were so very well pleased with the total development of their daughter that they allowed me the privilege of approving or disapproving the young man their daughter was to marry and—this is the clincher—I am a Negro man in a practically all-white school."

If You Were Superintendent-for-a-Year—

THE QUESTION WAS:

"Suppose you were a Superintendent of Schools with the power to act. You want to increase public understanding and support of teachers and schools. What is the one most important thing you could think of to do that would make a significant difference in a short time (say, one year)?"

There was a tremendous range of responses, from the pedestrian and unimaginative to the sometimes "far-out" but also very perceptive. Here is a selection of the individual quotations:

1

The first things some teachers would do would be to make the school critics come in to teach:

"Give the biggest loudmouth critics a class to teach for three months. Might not take even that long."

"I would have some of my teachers trade jobs with those individuals who say 'I sure wish I had a job that was six hours a day, nine months a year.' "

"Invite members of the community to come to school and teach about their field. It would let them know a little about how it is to go five or six hours straight with only a 30-minute lunch break. This worked very well with a banker friend of mine who no longer gouges me about my soft job!"

"I would make it a point to get the DAR, American Legion, and John Birchers to visit these overcrowded classes and watch our teachers try to do a top job under circumstances of overload, kids on pills, kids who need someone to listen to them, kids who wish their parents would drop dead."

"Bring parents in as aids to be hall monitors, study hall supervisors, attendance checkers, 'john' supervisors, and in any other capacity that would let them see the other side of school life."

"Invite critical parents to teach for one day—making sure they get the usual low salary and many papers to correct would give them immediate understanding."

"Let griping parents come in and teach for a day and see if they can do any damn better."

"Create a teacher-layman job exchange program for six weeks with members of the community, particularly the most vociferous critics of education. I have worked in the business world for several years and know teaching is much more demanding, though much more rewarding (although not financially)."

"Call a strike of teachers and let parents take over in our places. Then they'd see!"

"I would announce that as of September, school would open as usual, but no teachers as such would be in the classroom. Parents, concerned about their children, would then show up to see what's what. When they finally realize that one of them is going to have to teach and then that person finds out what it is like to be a teacher, he is not likely to keep quiet about the experience. Understanding can best take place when the public is forced to step into the shoes of the teacher for a while."

2
One way to build support, the teachers wrote, is to open the schools to the public:

"Rebuild the trust the public once had in our schools; make them feel comfortable in our schools by making them welcome."

"Establish the idea that the schools belong to the public. Make all physical plant available to the public at any time a school function was not in process, so on Saturdays and during summers the buildings were not sitting around idle."

"Open the school facilities for public use in the evenings and weekends and holidays at no cost to the public. The physical education facilities, gymnasiums, swimming pools, weight-lifting equipment, and wrestling/gymnastics rooms would be very popular. The auditoriums, stages, and classrooms could be used for local promotions for cultural exchange, lectures, group dynamics, and community theatricals. This would make the public feel they personally receive something from their tax dollar. I would also open the facilities for public inspection, easing the load on PR when a bond issue comes up."

"Open school classrooms to the whole community as well as allowing high school age students to attend night school for really different courses like film-making, independent reading, environmental studies, painting, auto mechanics for women, etc."

"The school should integrate with the community, not be a place separate and distinct."

"Begin a vigorous program of evening open houses. Open the schools to the public. Recreation courses utilizing the PE facilities. Teachers in their rooms two nights a week to instruct parents in abbreviated versions of the courses taught the students. Babysitting services provided by student groups, perhaps Home Econ. It would be a program designed to encourage people to think of the schools as part of their life, and education as an ongoing process."

"Make it easier for people to go and visit schools. Now in our city there are signs at each entrance that threaten prosecution for all visitors for trespassing. Take down the 'fences'."

3

Recognize the role of the public and treat citizens better, these teachers suggested:

"Show the taxpayer that we need him and his interests as much as his money."

"Treat citizens as individuals, not just as objects who cough up tax dollars."

"Admit that the community does indeed have a right to place demands upon the schools and should not be treated with contempt because they do so."

"Solicit the public for objectives they desire the school to achieve, and attempt to achieve those goals. Parents are still the primary educators of their children; we are merely their delegates."

"Schools are the agents of society and are guided by the times and we tend to think the opposite is true. We are the servants of society which has to be educated. Our part is more limited than idealists realize."

4

Another way to increase public support for schools is to use them the entire year, the teachers pointed out:

"I would make school year-around. A nine-month job doesn't please the public when it comes time to negotiate."

"Increase the school year to 12 months, eliminating the 'easy life' for teachers."

"Develop a 12-month school year for students and teachers, with a two-week break between semesters for students (one week then for teachers), and a one-week vacation for all at Christmas and Easter."

"I would promote the 12-month year. I feel the taxpayers are justified in complaining about buildings standing empty 2½ months. It would be easier for teachers to negotiate for salary increases if we, too, worked on an 11½-month basis.

5

The most important thing to do, many teachers responded, is to be completely and absolutely candid about the schools:

"Tell the truth for once."

"Tell it like it is, just once, by somebody."

"Let the public and teachers know what's going on, instead of doing things behind closed doors, and letting people get just bits and pieces of what's going on."

"Tell the people what we're doing. That's all. As they become informed and interested, they will appreciate and support us. Stop all phony propaganda and concentrate on pertinent facts."

"I would have a 'tell it like it is' rather than a 'tell it when it's good' public relations policy."

"Be candid and fair with the public at all times, not just when convenient. Work on the whole area of communication, including listening to the public as well."

"Stop hiding the drug problem and start informing parents when their children show any signs of becoming part of this problem."

"Install one-way glass and wired-for-sound galleries in classrooms so parents and public could view the educational process. Not a phony 'open house' where everybody is on their best behavior, but a candid viewing of the real scene. Let the parents see the 40 bodies, the talking out, the discourtesy, the administrative detail, the outside and inside interruptions, the good and the bad. Only then could the public realize just what public education is doing, can do, and cannot do."

"It seems that our school administration has so frequently said 'no more money'—then miraculously finds some. The public and staff no longer believe them. Absolute honesty with the public and staff is essential."

"Everyone, including school board and community, is pretty much on the outside looking in, assuming some things that are not true and totally unaware of a great number of things that go on in school."

And there are more:

"Make sure all facts reach the public. Fear has led officials to hide incidents. The violence that occurs daily (especially acts against teachers) is carefully hidden or subdued. The general public has no idea of what occurs, nor do officials in many cases. If these incidents were revealed instead of covered up, parents would be more understanding and cooperative."

"We need to get across what we are doing. Most parents don't know about it or are not given the opportunity to find out without prying."

"I feel most parents question what is happening in the schools because they do not know and are given so much misinformation that they react in fear of the unknown."

"Tell it like it is. The general public has no idea what really goes on inside a school today or the problems educators face. There is much, too much 'covering up' of extremely poor situations. The only way we will ever be able to get the general public's support is to let it know our problems—not enough money for books and other materials, no parental support, no way of disciplining students, school buildings in poor condition, hostile feelings among student groups, daily fights between students, fires that are arson and not 'spontaneous combustion,' verbal abuse, physical attacks, the terrible drug problem that exists and grows each day quite openly, etc. We will never increase public understanding by giving out phony press releases about our 'wonderful schools' and the 'wonderful job' we are doing. All we really are doing today is cheating our children, academically and emotionally, and it is really sad and frightening to think of the vast numbers of students we are sending into the world completely unprepared to face the problems of today."

There was this one opposite suggestion:

"Soft pedal the bad things that are going on in school, quietly trying to correct them. Emphasize the good that is being done in all areas."

6

Many teachers suggested involving parents to a much greater extent. First, they would shift the responsibility for their children right back to the family:

"Have parents responsible for the conduct and actions of their children."

"Give the children back to their parents. For too long we have been babysitting them when they come to school unprepared every day."

"Let the parents be responsible for their own children again. Drop all dress codes. Let the children come to school the way the parents send them. Stop making the teacher the 'bad guy' who sends them home."

"Make parents also accountable for student actions, discipline, and learning. When parents care and show interest and give praise, students seem much more eager to learn. They do not have the feeling that the teacher is a mean old boss. When an employer asks for some results or performance, students perform. When a teacher asks for a similar performance, students rebel. Parent attitudes are important."

"If parents could see the student's attire, their attendance under the influence of drugs, their truancy, their attitude, and their lack of preparation, they might be more willing to accept a part of the responsibility for their child's education. Do not misunderstand: most of our students are fine, but we have to take so much time away from the good ones to discipline the bad ones that everybody loses."

7
Next, get more of the parents into school more often:

"Have telephone committee members call all parents and personally invite them to an open school night. If they campaigned for parent attendance like they did for a bond election, we'd have great relations."

"Educate the public as to what really goes on in school. Before I went to work in the school, I was as ill-informed as all other parents as to what really took place."

"Invite the parents to take a course with their children."

"Have one afternoon a month where all stores would be closed from 1-3, like on Good Friday. This day the parents would be expected at school. Drunk, sober, whatever, they would all be at school one afternoon a month, for two hours, talking with teachers and their children."

"Increase what our principal already is doing: invite a cross-section of 50 parents at a time to spend a day in school, visit wherever they wish, see teachers about whom they have heard both complaints and compliments, see the facilities in use and smoking in the lav, and eat in the school lunch. They'd begin to understand and then talk in the community."

"Have parents plan, teach, evaluate, and correct papers from time to time. I'd be glad to have parents just help me check papers a few nights or at 5 a.m. several mornings a week. This is 'after hours' schoolteacher work."

More comments on the same approach:

"Pay each parent $10 for spending three consecutive hours attending any three classes he desired. They would also have to eat lunch in the cafeteria and attend 15 minutes of any of our large study halls. (If necessary, raise it to $15 for the men.)"

"Invite parents to school with children as often as one day a month. Let the mother see there are children worse then hers and what the teacher is faced with."

"I would dispense with all forms of evaluation other than a written report delivered during a parent-student-teacher conference. This would allow for information exchange with all three primary parties present."

"We have a student take-over day when the students are elected to the administrative positions and are elected or selected to teach classes. They may teach in only one class. This includes lesson plans and must be a teaching experience, not a play day. They learn a great deal about teachers and teaching. Something like this for parents would be great."

"Rent the Memorial Coliseum for the weekend so working parents could see displays of handouts and quiz papers used in the courses. Have students and teachers man the booths."

"Have the parents come to school in place of the student sometime, and go through the day's schedule, take the tests, make the reports, read the assignments, etc. The amount of understanding would be greatly improved. The parents don't really know what their children are enduring and accomplishing."

"Allow the student to miss school one day each quarter if the student's parent would sit in for him that day."

"Get the parents more involved. Many parents drop out of the picture when children reach high school age, and they shouldn't. Maybe if they were required to come to school at regular intervals, some youngsters might do a better job of getting educated. High school students just aren't as grown up as they want to feel they are. They need responsibility but they need help, too."

"Withhold grades until each parent spent at least one day in school visiting the student's classes."

And these final suggestions:

"Call upon each parent to contribute in some way to the curriculum—carpenters could teach in the shop in their spare time, a lawyer could teach a civics course, etc."

"Appoint a person to hear all the problems of the parents."

"Start group therapy for parents to help them realize they are failing their students by not encouraging them to study. Too many children spend their time watching television when they could be improving their minds."

"See to it that teachers have more time to get to know parents, parents of all students, not just the ones who are failing."

"Schedule as many teachers as possible to visit homes of students to meet face-to-face with the parents."

"Get parents involved and interested in their schools rather than have them feel their job is done when they elect a school board."

"Offer parents—yes, I mean parents—meaningful courses in sex education, understanding minority groups, child guidance, and drug abuse."

"Have laymen of all types teach for a week. Let them do the class material, take the lunch count, wipe the noses, etc. Put the teacher in the industry, the office, the store at the same time. We need to understand more of each other's problems."

8

To increase understanding and support, these teachers suggested involving students more:

"Let the students become more active in the town and have more say in school."

"Have students address the public at assemblies or meetings. Nothing like the kids themselves to sell the school."

"Enlist the aid of the students themselves. They are really interested in their education. Encourage them to explain things to people, not only their parents—the needs of the school, what goes on in the classrooms, how improvements might be made. Perhaps if the adults would really listen to what our students say, the present so-called generation gap would shrink."

"Set up a committee of students to serve as speakers on behalf of the school. They would create a good impression by being well-dressed, well-mannered, and satisfied with our educational system."

"I would put every student to work in a communication campaign to raise money to educate those who want to learn, and send all others back home to stay until they decide they want to learn."

"Turn the burden of better schools back to the students. If they wish to learn more, they must study more. If each student would study one-half hour more per day, achievement would measurably improve."

"Turn all matters except the budget over to the students. Power to the students."

9

Gain support by expelling the "impossible" students, these teachers recommended:

"Arrange for the students who are antieverything to leave school."

"Stop trying to teach everyone and realize that education is not for everyone. It is a privilege to be educated, not a God-given right. Maintain schools only for those who wish to learn. Eliminate the 'undesirables,' the troublemakers, the delinquents, the potential criminals. There is a place for these people, but it is not in our public schools."

"Expel permanently a few individual students who do not respond to sexual morality, respect for authority, respect for property, respect for the rights of other students."

"Get problem students out so those who would like to learn can do so."

"I'd crack down on the 'hoods' and other troublemakers in the classroom. The loud-mouthed Neanderthals make it very difficult for those who want to learn."

"The incorrigible students are destroying our schools. I would make mass removals of all troublesome students and place them in special centers. Such drastic action would reveal who the incorrigibles really are. Those capable of normal behavior would want to get back to their regular school. Many of these have been imitating the behavior of the incorrigibles since they have been getting away with their capers and remain on and on, corrupting the behavior and attitudes of normal students. Our problem, in short, is to find out who the incorrigibles are and to treat them."

"I'd establish wider use of suspension and expulsion of students who are habitually troublesome, disruptive, and obviously not interested in school. While the public school owes everyone the opportunity for education, I don't feel it owes such people a forum for their foolishness or a babysitting service for young heads and hoods."

10

Make the student the important person in education, these suggested:

"I would review every decision for its effect on an individual child, not on what effect it would have on teachers, taxpayers, parents, or the public. Operate on the premise that schools and all things that go with them exist for one purpose: 'some individual kid needs to be taught.' "

"I would stop trying to impress the public and start trying to do something for the student. Get rid of administrators who are concerned only with the public and not with students."

"I would create my public image as a defender of the child against the unjust part of the system, and thus gain rightful approval of students."

"I would try to do something about promoting students before they learn to read or write. That is unfair and the cause of many high school dropouts. Students are embarrassed in the classroom before they reach high school and learn not to try and so continue to fail."

11
The school-leaving age brought these comments:

"Make school attendance begin at age 8. Now, students learn the same thing over and over too much. Also allow compulsory attendance to end at age 15."

"Lower the school compulsory attendance age to 16. In some cases, let junior high be the terminating point. Condense the curriculum so the above-average student could graduate by 16 and go on to higher education. Encourage those students not capable of achieving in school by age 16 to seek employment in some type of industrial training program outside public education."

"Quit making juniors and seniors stay in school all day when they don't need the credit."

"I'd do away with compulsory education."

"Abolish mandatory education. The whole notion of a school rests on freedom of choice. Compulsory education makes prisoners of students and teachers. It allows society to anesthetize itself to real needs by propagating and perpetuating a system which itself propagates and perpetuates 'needs' often irrelevant to those actually experienced by individuals."

12
Having alternative programs for students who aren't going or shouldn't go to college is another means of gaining support (and of motivating some of the "incorrigibles" better):

"I'd prepare nonacademic students better."

"Make education after junior high a voluntary thing. Build up vocational schools for those not really interested in or capable of completing high school."

"Educate the public to the need for vocational education in this college-oriented academic community."

"Shift the emphasis from college preparation to trade-craft preparation. High schools need apprenticeship programs."

"Provide more practical training for students who don't plan to go to college. Turn on some of the bored students this way, and elevate the importance and worthiness of skilled trades."

"Have more work experiences count for credit toward graduation."

"Suggest alternatives to a system that is still geared to prepare students to enter a university to which most of them should never go."

"Designate some high schools as academic, some business, some to train for vocations."

"Convert 50% of high schools to fine vocational schools and tell the public we need good plumbers and electricians as well as college graduates. High school can no longer function by compelling non-college-bound students to attend."

"If I could do one thing, I'd establish special-interest high schools (college-prep, vocational, trade, technical). This would solve many problems relative to dropouts, discipline, and public relations."

"We must have an educational system that permits all people to seek the field of their interest and abilities. College is not for everyone (as society now demands) for we would be lost without plumbers."

13

Getting more public support and understanding for the schools begins right at home with teachers, TEACH-POLL respondents pointed out. They would start by giving teachers more responsibility:

"Give each school's staff complete autonomy over its program."

"Make each senior high and its feeder schools sufficiently autonomous so they could revise their curriculum to fit the needs of the students in their districts. Citywide rules, regulations, and curriculum cannot be as effective as ones designed for the socioeconomic groupings of each individual district."

"Let teachers determine many policies by which the school will be run. Teachers know the students best. We should have more influence on how the students are treated and disciplined."

"Give more power to the teachers. Allow them just enough privileges to let students know they are to be respected and obeyed. The teacher is now at the level of the school system's underdog and all the students know it and they react accordingly, believe me."

"Empower administrators and teachers to enforce discipline by whatever means they find effective."

"Create an environment in which principals and teachers do not feel threatened but feel they have a real share in determining policy. If principals and teachers are secure, this will reflect directly on the students who are the loudest and most direct voice to the community."

14
Support and listen to teachers more:

"As superintendent, I would listen to teachers' constructive criticisms."

"I would stop defending the student and the parent and do something for the teachers. At least, the teachers should be given the courtesy of presenting their side of an issue. Too often, the teachers are victims of administrative maneuvering."

"I would ask teachers 'What do you need most to improve your teaching situation? Tell me by the end of the week.' And Monday morning their consensus recommendation would be implemented or at least started."

"I would be a great listener to every teacher."

"Make teachers feel as important as they really are and not like pawns. This would tend to make the teachers do a much better job."

"Get teachers in and ask for ideas and help (and listen to them for a change). Their training and education (often superior to that of administrators and guidance people) certainly should be able to contribute something to student understanding and other problems."

"All the publicity in the world will do no good if the teachers feel neglected, looked down upon, and used as pawns by the administration."

"Show understanding and support of teachers. As long as the superintendent places himself in an almighty role and refuses to accept ideas of his staff members, the public's image of the teacher will not be improved."

"I would support the teachers and not be a puppet of the school board."

"The best superintendent I ever had was the champion of his teachers. If they made mistakes, he was very outspoken in his conferences with them. He was fair with every teacher and expected each teacher to be aware of the importance of the good image she presented to the townspeople. His loyalty to his teachers was answered by their loyalty to him."

"I would schedule regular meetings with committees from each school to discuss the problems of students and teachers. Most teachers have never met or discussed one thing with their superintendent."

15
Many teachers suggested improving relations with teachers in additional ways:

"I would get from behind the desk. Get out into the community. Meet with teachers, tell them what is being planned rather than having them read about it in the news."

"Inform teachers of happenings within their school before students and press. (This year we read things in the newspaper about our school which were news to us. Students seemed to know before the teachers. Reason: School board members and secretaries talk shop downtown and at home. We should not be kept in the dark!)"

"Try to improve my own relationships with the teachers and raise the morale. Teachers are in the middle between parents and students on the one side and administration on the other. Teaching is difficult and the rewards and satisfactions achieved are of the long-term variety. Hence, a recognition of accomplishment, a few words of praise, and even a friendly relationship would accomplish wonders as a morale builder. The teachers, in turn, would serve as the best public relations force for the school system."

"I am in a small system of less than 800 teachers and I have never talked with my superintendent on any subject. After 10 years in the system, I am not sure he knows I exist. Have better PR!"

"If I were superintendent of schools, I would try to know my teachers. I have been given a top rating for years, but I have never met my superintendent, nor has he sent me a kudo for work well done."

"Have good rapport with teachers and parents. Take an active interest in the work of the faculty. There are very few superintendents who have achieved the distinction of being personable."

"Win support of my own teachers. Most administrators are too aloof, too unfriendly, consider themselves superior. Most got their positions through political influence and as long as they please the powers that be, they become a permanent fixture, effective or not."

"I'd begin by rebuilding teacher morale and self-respect. This would not take money but simply an emphasis on teachers as professional people and human beings. Teachers should not be able to make all decisions, but they should be able to feel that the decisions are for them and in their interest."

"Have a closer relationship with the classroom teachers. The best publicity comes from the students and if you have good working relations along the chain of command, you eliminate misunderstanding between the administration and the teachers."

"I'd be honest enough with my teachers to admit my own limited capabilities. Then I'd call on them for assistance."

"I would employ only teachers interested in young people, who regard their career as a profession, and who are not clock watchers. If you have good teachers, you can succeed. With poor teachers, you are defeated before you begin."

16
These teachers would set standards and require performance:

"I would create and maintain standards by which teachers must conduct themselves and prepare themselves. Without standards, it is difficult for teachers to be regarded as professionals."

"Set standards in class loads, grooming for student and teacher, conduct for student and teacher. Enforce them."

"Set up standards which are meaningful as the Catholic schools do. The students either respect and do meet the standards or leave."

"Deny contracts to teachers who do not support the regulations of the school. Plenty of good teachers are available."

17
These commented on accountability:

"If we are going to continue to get support for education, we have got to be more accountable. We have got to show more common sense and be more concerned with getting more for the dollar. Teachers will have to share more of the responsibility for what occurs."

"There must be more communication between parent and teacher, school and community, those receiving tax dollars and those paying them. If accountability could be the means—letting people know what we really accomplish with what we really get to work with, comparing this to businessmen and factory workers and production—much good would result. I feel the average teacher gives a very good account of every tax dollar spent."

"Incorporate a good accountability measure for each department and weed out the incompetency."

"Impress upon teachers that they are hired to do a day's work for a day's pay."

18
Having teachers participate in outside activities drew these comments:

"Get the teachers to participate in community affairs."

"Insist that teachers get involved with some civic, charitable, or local group. This mingling with citizens helps teachers get acquainted with other people in all walks of life."

And this objection:

"I'd suspend all outside activities for teachers."

19
Get rid of everything but teaching, these said:

"Publish a list of duties imposed on teachers, then abolish 99% of them so teachers have time to prepare to teach, to teach, and to evaluate."

"Let the teachers teach and cut off the extra duties—
bookstore duty,
parking lot duty,
hall duty,
policeman duty,
toilet duty,
fair booth salesman duty,
bus duty,
morning duty,
lunch duty,
yard duty,
bomb scare duty,
locker duty,
night performance duty,
taking-absent-or-ill-teacher's-place-during-off-period duty."

20
Another way to gain support would be to involve retired persons more:

"It's a crime that schools don't make greater use of retired people."

"Many older retired individuals young in attitude and concerned for youngsters would make excellent sources for enriching experiences for them as well as young people."

"Encourage retired families to visit school. Give out free passes to sports and drama."

"Establish positions, top to bottom, for retired and semiretired members of the community to work part time as advisers, vocational resource people, teaching assistants, playground supervisors, etc. Involving the maximum number of individuals throughout the system would aid in understanding and tap a vast reservoir of knowledge and experience."

21
The solution, these teachers wrote, is just being happy:

"I am less concerned with public understanding than with first improving the classroom situation itself. If students and teachers were happier in school, that attitude would infiltrate the homes and the communities and public understanding would come. Work toward making the schools happy places where everyone involved will enjoy himself."

"Help and trust each employee and insist that there be happiness in the work. If the principals are happy, they help teachers. If teachers are happy, they help students. If students are happy, they make the best public relations."

22

Cutting staff, eliminating unnecessary jobs, and getting rid of the "deadwood" were ideas that attracted many superintendents-for-a-day:

"I would cut the central administration staff to a bare minimum."

"Reduce the administrative staff and as a result reduce the teaching load of classroom teachers."

"I would do away with all the 'padding' and special benefits that go to administration centers."

"The present ratio of teachers to administration in our city is 3:1. There are too many administrators (consultants for texts, consultants for curriculum, area superintendents, assistants for each area superintendent, etc., etc.) and there are too few teachers. I would change the ratio to 10:1 by hiring more teachers and returning some administrators to the classroom."

"Get rid of most administrators. Give more responsibility to teachers for curriculum, policy, hiring of new teachers. Use the money saved for more books, supplies, equipment, and more teachers. Insist students learn to read, whatever the cost. Deemphasize interschool athletics. Recognize publicly that teachers are usually more intelligent and better educated than administrators."

"Remove 76% of all administrators, coordinators, and other nonclassroom personnel and replace them with energetic, imaginative teachers. This would lower class size, improve the quality and quantity of education, and improve morale in the teaching profession. More individual concern for the student would soon filter back to parents who would vocalize increasing community pride in their schools."

This writer would eliminate his own job:

"Superintendents could be eliminated and replaced by a business manager. Too many of them worry about unrelated aspects of their jobs and tie themselves in knots with unreal problems. They should make a decision upon assuming this position that either they work for the students, the public in general, the school staff, or themselves. They end up trying to please all four of these groups and usually fail."

These teachers would eliminate teachers, too, and not just administrators:

"Save money by releasing some of the older teachers by an accountability program."

"Abolish tenure and replace the teacher who sees teaching just as a way to earn a buck. The lackadaisical teacher does more to hinder public support and understanding than anything else. Her students do not learn and become problems in her class and in general."

"Demand that teachers teach. When I think of how much good is done by the relatively small number of teachers who really work at teaching, I firmly believe that a whole staff working at the job would astound the school. I work hard at teaching and do a terrific job. If all were like me, you would have a school where students thought and learning took place."

"Clean house of derelicts and misfits in the teaching profession."

"Grant tenure on a five-year basis, renewable by board of education reexamination and approval toward the end of each period. Give the individual whose contract is not likely to be renewed a year's time to seek other employment."

"Promote a teachers' organization with spunk enough to police its own ranks and get rid of incompetent and unprofessional teachers."

"Get rid of teachers who are not doing the job. I get tired of being around teachers who don't give a damn about school and/or the kids."

"Get rid of tenure and go on a merit system of pay and institute a good evaluation system of teachers. We carry a lot of deadwood around."

"Remove the incompetents and those who are trying to indoctrinate the students about a particular political or social or religious philosophy."

"Decrease middle management, bringing the teacher into more direct contact with the superintendent and making money available for equipment, books, and direct services to youth."

"Get rid of all the consultants and coordinators. Some are unnecessary, many are inefficient, and it would improve both relations and the budget."

"Eliminate many jobs. For instance, I cannot see that counselors have helped students get into the right classes any better now than when students chose classes themselves with the aid of parents."

23

Better support means more money, for one thing, and there were many comments on the subject of financing. If they were superintendent with real power to act, these teachers would:

"Close the schools for one year."

"Close the doors until the district could afford to run a good program."

"Call for a one-year moratorium on all classes, as time for reevaluation of the educational system."

"Shut down school. This would force an economic hardship on most communities, with all teens looking for work. The public would learn the degree to which teachers and schools are babysitting."

"If I were in a Catholic school system, I'd close down and let the public schools see how much it would cost to operate with our students. Taxes would go sky high and those concerned would see we need the dual system and would reimburse the overburdened Catholic parent by giving aid to private education."

"Since I teach in a parochial high school, if I were Superintendent of Schools, I would immediately announce the closing of grades 1 through 4 in the parochial elementary schools to increase public awareness of how vital our schools are in the educational process and to show that they cannot continue without financial help. If no help comes from this selective closing, I would close all parochial schools and let the tax burden be assumed by all people for the public schools remaining. Many minority groups have been helped in the U.S. since 1954, but children in private schools seem to have been forgotten."

These teachers would be less drastic:

"I would withdraw services until the public realized their true value."

"I'd start cutting out vital programs which directly affect numbers of students. With this, maybe a point could be made regarding how much responsibility the schools have."

"If people aren't willing to support schools, start cutting back on extracurricular programs first, then school maintenance, then in teaching staff. The net effect would soon be understood."

"Cut out all extracurricular activities and the public would vote the schools all kinds of money to restore the activities."

"Abolish the free textbook system so tax money could be used to better advantage and we could change texts more frequently and keep abreast of things."

"Indicate that unless greater support is forthcoming, there will be no bus transportation for students, no athletics at any level, and no kindergartens."

These would ask only the parents for more money:

"Ask the parents to share in the cost of the extras they insist on."

"Ask each parent to pay part of the expense of his child's education, apart from taxes. For too many, something that is 'free' has no value."

24

Be more open in reporting actual costs, these suggest:

"Publish a financial summary of the district to show how the board spends the taxpayers' money. Break it down into categories like administration, guidance, classroom teaching, extracurricular athletics, and so forth. Our school budget is reported in such a way as to hide the actual cost of these items."

"Inform the public better about true conditions in school and classroom. Many schools put up excellent cover-ups on Open House Night, by showing the best work and best side of their program. This deception by educators leads to their downfall. When schools begin crying for financial aid, the public has seen only a well-manicured picture and thinks no more money is needed."

25

If they were in charge, these teachers would increase teacher salaries:

"Ask for a referendum so teacher salaries can be increased."

"Set up teacher salaries according to a cost-of-living index."

"Double teacher salaries."

"Make the starting salary for teachers $8,000 a year. This might sound unreasonable but I feel the teacher is our biggest problem. The majority of teachers don't have time for public relations because they are too busy trying to get extra money."

"I'd go for better prepared and better paid teachers, not fancy buildings. Textbooks and libraries, rather than fieldhouses and swimming pools."

"I'd do everything humanly possible to raise teacher salaries so they would know the school was willing to give more than lip service to appreciating their efforts."

This one would lower a salary:

"First get their attention by reducing my annual salary from $24,000 to $14,000. This would bring trust and support from both sides."

26

These would do things about taxes:

"Remove the school tax completely."

"Eliminate the property tax and tax every citizen equally to pay for schools."

"Put school financing on a basis other than property tax. Public education is becoming the scapegoat for frustrated taxpayers."

"Find a method of financing that would not burden the property owners. This is the chief reason for people not supporting our schools at present."

"Obtain more money to buy necessary books, supplementary materials, teaching aids. If necessary, see that property taxes are raised to do this."

27

These had other financial suggestions:

"I would encourage teachers not to demand such high salaries and would provide an example by stabilizing my own. I would hope that teachers might be able to set an example for the rest of the community by showing that we don't need (and shouldn't have) three cars, a boat, a $25,000 home, a cottage, etc., etc."

"I would review earnestly and sincerely the teacher pay scale. Devise some way to reward dedicated teachers who make this a life work. Reduce the salaries of some 'hangers-on' who get top pay because of tenure, but are lousy teachers, boring, ill-prepared."

"I would try to stop 6.5% increases for front office workers when there are only 2.3 or 3.1% increases for teachers."

"Emphasize that we can't make progress in any area unless we invest more in public education. We can't afford to let anybody escape the opportunity for a good free education as long as he has the capacity to use it."

"Forget about merit pay."

"Quit buying so much junk, e.g., TVs, projectors, etc., and put the money toward more classrooms, more teachers, and more fundamentals, also more professional guidance counselors and more pay to entice better teachers. I would much prefer a small class of 18 students with an almost bare room to 25 students in a room with TV, overhead projector, etc., etc."

And these said that salary wasn't the solution, anyway:

"I would enjoy a better salary, but ever-increasing salaries are not ultimately the answer to improved high school performance."

"I would rather have a lower salary with better working conditions."

28

To gain more support, these teachers say make the following changes in the school's academic program:

"Require each social studies and English teacher to document how his classes have been exposed to all points of view on given issues."

"Increase and expand the art departments, to let more kids express their creative ability. Self-creativity spreads from one area to the next, and this would only bring about a generally more vigorous overall program, even spreading to parents and townspeople."

"Somehow improve the ability of students to read."

"Increase emphasis on reading, writing, and arithmetic. This would do more than anything to increase the productivity and quality of students."

"Immediately reduce the elementary teacher's class load to no more than 15 students so she would have a fighting chance to teach Johnny how to read."

"Make the public aware that many people graduate with second grade reading ability."

"Do away with modular scheduling because the immature student does not attend his classes regularly."

"Give demonstrations of school innovations during halftime at football and basketball games."

"The parochial schools are the last remaining stronghold of discipline which is still the foundation of learning. Learning takes place only in a quiet and orderly environment."

"Completely overhaul the curriculum. Business organizations should help with this since they are the future employers of the graduates of community schools."

"Create a new program which would involve the middle-class student, making him really interested in school and learning. (Of course, finding a program of this type would be the problem.)"

"Institute a new system of issuing diplomas and a different policy for passing to higher grades. The present methods cater to lazy students."

This teacher had a 'sure-fire' method:

"Require a high school diploma before anyone could get a driver's license. We would then have our schools filled with 'scholars'."

29

These shifted to nontextbook topics:

"I would encourage more respect for and understanding of morality and others."

"Bring back the paddle and Bible reading."

"Return the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag and class prayer to the first class of each day."

"Cut out 'social' promotions and restore paddling not only for flagrant disobedience but also for APATHY."

And these two had exactly opposite views:

"Innovate the most progressive methods of education known today. The world is a classroom, and the student's curriculum should expand to include more meaningful facets of life than academics. We stand to gain a lot in education, and we have nothing to lose but an ineffective system."

"Do NOT try new, dramatic, eye-catching, public relations types of innovations. Rather, use some of the solid, time-tested methods of instruction that are simple, practical, and workable. Avoid untried, fanciful fads and foibles until they are proved and applicable beyond the context of experimental schools connected with colleges of education."

30

To improve support, many teachers suggested getting a better "press" for public education. The first route would be through newspapers:

"I would write a weekly column in the local newspaper explaining the problems, needs, happenings, attitudes, and whatever else might be necessary so the general public would become legitimately informed about the school. However, the superintendent would have to be truly honest in what he said and as objective as possible. Our present superintendent could be neither."

"Do an article in the local paper on a teacher about his life both at home and at school, his problems, enjoyments, and long hours of work. Show both the teacher and the human (a side the public often feels the teachers are losing)."

"Have each school faculty elect a teacher-of-the-year, then promote the results through the media."

"We need to be in the news, not telling about students getting booted out for long hair, drugs, riots, or smoking but telling about accomplishments and what they have done to reach these. We need to tell some whys, explain our goals, and show how we are improving the community, city, state, and nation with our school system."

"Let the general public know that teachers work and work hard in trying to educate the children. I have never seen anything in the newspaper about the problems the teacher faces in contending with students of our inner-city school and the disruptive student."

"Have a widespread campaign in the paper to show the public all the 'little' things a teacher does. Tell the public how much time it takes to make out a test, give it, grade it, explain grades, make up tests for students who miss. Alert the public to the system of getting grades from all teachers to the child's report card—probably a five-hour process from start to finish—plus figuring up the Honor Roll. Tell the public about the routine of selling lunch tokens, making up monthly reports, attending school functions, and meetings of the faculty members for various things. On top of all this, the public also expects the teacher to support the children's projects by buying calendars, cookies, tickets to various events, football jerseys, and Lord knows what else."

Others would use television:

"Make a series of films of classes, hallways, lunchrooms, student council meetings, faculty meetings, everything. No narration, just the natural sounds. Air the whole series on TV."

"Promote a good TV advertising program."

"Buy prime time on television for a weekly series."

"Have panel discussions on TV with teachers and local citizens."

"Videotape interesting classes where students were goofing off or being uncooperative or negative, as well as interesting classes which succeeded because of student participation and include them as regular news items on the evening news—without editorial comment except to explain the learning objective."

"Have the schools hook up with cable television and broadcast programs from the schools to the homes. Also broadcast board of education meetings. Instructional TV is the coming thing in education and will help to save it."

"Use 30-second commercials on TV and radio, and the format of the lung cancer commercials."

Others favored an advertising campaign:

"Advertise schools as a supermarket advertises its products."

"Advertise through the public media. It is rather expensive, but business benefits by it and education could, too."

"A good advertising campaign, similar to the cancer society about cigarets, can do more than nearly anything else. The hard sell may not be honest, but it works."

31

These teachers suggested training the teachers better:

"Set up an inservice training program for teachers in public relations, community betterment, guidance, and counseling."

"Develop professionalism within the school faculty through inservice training so that the teachers themselves would speak favorably about their colleagues and profession. Teachers are unique in that they are prone to criticize negatively their profession in public."

"Give all teachers an inservice course on the psychology of salesmanship. I would want my teachers to be as aggressive as a used-car salesman in having parents and students realize how much schools can do for them."

32

And these favor an organized "PR" campaign:

"Hire a damn good PR man."

"Put on the world's greatest public information campaign (not a whitewash or a facade). When the people know the facts and know that they know the facts, most of them will support schools and/or offer constructive criticisms."

These oppose:

"I would not hire a PR man. They are so phony that even the staff laughs at them. Usually they don't know what's going on."

"Public support is more likely with tangible evidence of progress. Public relations efforts have been a waste."

33

And this teacher, even though he labels it otherwise, would have strict censorship of school news:

"Appoint immediately a staff member to serve as the only contact with the press to 'feed' positive information as often as possible. He would screen all press reports on less positive matters. For example, if a riot occurs, reporters would not be allowed to cover the scene except under the express provision that what they wrote about it and what was quoted would first be previewed by this staff member. All school board meetings and other school meetings would be 'covered' by this staff member, with the media treated impartially to very factual reports. This would not be censorship, or it would, of course, not work. The idea would be to prevent 'out-of-context' reporting and misleading publicity, since just one unfavorable report can ruin the image of a school. (Our school has yet to live down the report of extensive drug usage.)"

34

These teachers would increase communication to parents:

"Contact parents with good news about good students. Don't limit contacts to those in trouble."

"I have heard of a principal who spends two hours a day telephoning parents to report positive things their children have done at school. His program meant a great understanding of the actual school system in that community."

And finally, these suggestions:

"Send a weekly newsletter to every parent telling some of the happenings in the school, problems encountered, etc."

"Have adults tell the influence which good teachers have had on their lives."

"Remove censorship from the school paper and mail it out to each home."

"Have the media make a sensational thing out of unusual GOOD events."

"Wine and dine (get to know) the owners of the local press, radio, and TV. Find out the power structure of the community and work through these media to promote changes, reforms, or new ideas. Community involvement is extremely important in insuring the success of any academic or social program of a school."

There was one teacher who objected to the question about how to increase public understanding and support. He wrote:

"I wouldn't want to do this. It's not an admirable goal. Schools should be for learners. Maybe the public shouldn't understand or support them. I keep in mind George Barnard Shaw's comment about the only thing that interrupted his education was formal schooling!"

35

Teachers responding to this question made three kinds of comments that referred to ethnic groups. The first group went like this:

"Because ours is a community where integration is in effect but not accepted, I would instigate a school-community program to get more ties between the two."

"Introduce courses to serve deprived students."

"Hire more minority personnel."

"We should emphasize any activity in which racial progress is being made."

"Stop treating blacks in a condescending manner."

The second group included these:

"Integration is destroying the American school system."

"Segregate the schools."

"Be firm with all students regardless of race."

"I would not allow any minority group to dictate or demand changes that would adversely affect the responsible majority."

"Listen to all groups, not just the militant. We have gone over so much to please the blacks, the disadvantaged, that the average hard-working middle-class white feels like he has been 'had'. This country of ours swings too violently from one extreme to another. The 1970s 'disenfranchised' white wants his rights, too. Mandatory busing, mandatory this and that, must be arbitrated, not forced."

"Return public schools to the individual districts and let students or their parents choose any school within the district. This would end forced busing and cut down on dislike for one's school. It also would help eliminate substandard private schools that appeared when schools were paired and busing started."

"Being Superintendent of Schools wouldn't be of much aid in making changes. The federal government runs every aspect of the schools and education and the superintendent just does what he can to smooth things over and make the situation tolerable. Teachers have to teach in schools they don't want to go to. Students have to go to schools they don't want to go to. Some families have children in four or five different schools. All activities have to be canceled sometimes because the two factions in the school (black and white) hate each other and therefore cause trouble. Students are miserable as a result. How can we continue to teach under these circumstances?"

And one teacher was stumped:

"I cannot think of only one thing I'd do as superintendent that could please both the white public and the black public."

36
As superintendent, the teachers would take these actions regarding athletics:

"Eliminate interscholastic athletics."

"Abolish study halls and athletics."

"Stop the extracurricular activities including the sports which provide John Q. Public with his entertainment."

"Cut out some boys' athletics and the spending of money for five coaches (each sport), uniforms, travel, etc."

"Cut back the great expenditure for athletics."

"Stop promoting coaches to the rank of principal. Many coaches may be fine on the playing field but do not belong in the head office."

"Use athletics more to teach love, understanding, and hard work."

"Elevate academic success to the same level as athletic success."

"Don't make the public have to depend on reports from the sports page. A school is judged too much by its sports program rather than academic."

"Produce a winning football team. (Actually, I believe we should deemphasize sports; however, any endeavor is largely public relations so do anything that will bring good publicity.)"

37
What would you do if suddenly you became a Superintendent of Schools? These teachers were discouraged:

"I'd resign."

"Resign in protest against the state legislature's failure to provide funds."

"I have no idea. It would be a hellish job."

"I really don't know—the problems are too great, there are too many on all fronts, I would not want the job."

"I have no idea. I wonder sometimes how anyone can be hired for the job of superintendent. (We have a great one, but I'm sure there are many pressures on him.)"

"When I first began teaching, I could have answered this; now after 18 years, I am at a loss."

"I'd throw up my hands and give up."

"This community is so conservative there is nothing a superintendent could do. Here he has no say and is only a rubber stamp for the board."

"Our superintendent just did a fine job but still failed. The public is too concerned about taxes to understand."

"There isn't anything a superintendent could to. The public will not under any circumstance support or try to understand teachers and schools."

"This is an unrealistic situation. Superintendents don't have the power to move a stagnant system in one year, or even four, for that matter."

And there were more:

"I don't think you could do anything in a short period of time that would increase public understanding. I don't think the public is interested enough to really study the situation. They are interested in mill levies and unique situations exploited by news media and that is really about all. I believe in most communities the town 'wheels' are the ones to be concerned with if you are going to get something done."

"The courts have taken away so much power from the schools, this is what makes teaching so difficult. The teacher has lost a lot of his authority. How can a superintendent remedy that?"

"Nothing will make any difference as long as schools allow themselves to serve as escape hatches for society. For example, the Russians put Sputnik in orbit so we go into a crash program in the schools; U.S. males are found to be not physically fit so we go into a big PE program; there is a high number of deaths on the highway so we start driver ed in schools. Drop the frills and window dressing and return to educational and intellectual discipline of subject matter, that's what we should do."

"Most places vegetate in a TV culture and many teachers in such places are products of the same crassness. In such places, pupils are ground through, by law and in time, and are four years older at the end of such a process. That's about the main change."

"Public schools today drearily plod along, getting by, instead of making the school and the community vibrate with the wonderful things that could be done with young minds."

"Until the schools produce sensitive, creative, autonomous and thinking individuals, we do not deserve support and a majority of the criticism is valid."

These teachers wrote:

"I'd walk on water."

"I'd pray."

"Hire my own school board."

"I have no idea. I am not a superintendent, and hopefully, will never be one."

"If I could answer this question, I'd retire."

"If I could answer this one, I'd *be* a superintendent instead of a teacher."

"If I had an answer for this, I could head the President's commission on education."

"Thank God I'm not one."

"Thank goodness the Peter Principle has not gone into effect yet. I am a teacher who is competent instead of a superintendent who is incompetent."

And we heard from one superintendent-elect:

"I will be! I'm going to try to produce outstanding results of an academic nature which will be publicized as thoroughly as school achievements in athletics, drama, etc."

38

To improve support for the schools, the teachers recommend this range of relationship with school boards:

"Force the school board to take a stand on such things as discipline, class size, school dress, etc. Too many school board members are interested in just being on a board rather than doing something constructive."

"Educate the board of education toward a positive attitude toward education."

"Educate school board members as to what basic skills and needs really are in education. This will not be easy."

"Put some teachers on the school board, someone who has an idea of what the school as a whole and the classroom is really like."

"Buck board members who are badly at fault even if it means your job. Be different by being brave. Establish yourself as a strong personality. If the board doesn't want a strong person, you can move or do something else."

"Tell the board to go to hell."

39

As superintendent-for-a-year, the teachers would:

"Spend more time around the schools, the teachers, and the classrooms, instead of downtown with the business element, the civic clubs, and public relations promotion."

"First try to understand what is going on in the classroom. Superintendents today are executive heads of large businesses and really are not in touch."

"Put myself in the classroom for six months."

"Have all administrators teach at least one class per day."

"Personally get down into the schools, talk to teachers, find out their problems, observe classes, talk to parents and students, and try to do something about what I find."

See to it that the supervisors are on the job:

"I'd have supervisors get out and do their job as most classroom teachers are never checked or told to improve so they slide by with very poor techniques."

"Have better supervisors and more help for new teachers by department chairmen, assistant principal, and principal. Too many supervisors are scarcely seen. In three years, only a department chairman saw me teach. I finally invited others to visit the class."

"Poor teachers get on tenure because they are not properly supervised or helped. Taxpayers get stuck with poor teachers many, many years and don't want teachers to get more money. They remember the boring, uncreative teachers. More pay doesn't make these teachers better, but better supervision at the beginning might have."

Take a strong stand on discipline:

"Take a strong stand, discipline-wise, then the townspeople would not be afraid to send their children to school."

"Take a stand against all the permissiveness practiced by parents. Tighten down on discipline in schools. This wouldn't be popular with all parents but it would help them solve many of their own problems."

"Follow our rules and require others to follow them. Example: Our policy states that if a student is absent 17 or more days, he will lose credit in the class. As teachers, we must tell this to the students. They laugh at us because the superintendent allows them to attend Saturday School where the student comes and sits for four hours and this is the 'equivalent' of a full day of school. It encourages a student to skip on a school day and then sit through a Saturday morning."

Be more businesslike:

"Stop playing politician and act more like a businessman."

"Have the administration of a school district run like an efficient corporation. I have never been satisfied with the way ex-school teachers run schools. They know next to nothing about running a profitable, efficient business. Let business run the administration and allow teachers to teach."

Be an enthusiastic leader:

"I would infuse myself with excitement and enthusiasm about all the amazing strengths and good qualities of my system and its teachers. Make certain this excitement is obvious at every contact with the public, school board, parents, and teachers."

"I would have more inspired leadership. Some of my principals have truly made me feel that my job was important and appreciated by the administration."

Take these additional stands:

"Let everyone know where they stand and be consistent in enforcement."

"Establish the priority issues needed to make this a better school, make these known to the public, and state my position in regard to them. The reason most superintendents don't do this is because it is more comfortable to 'ride the fence,' so they can fall either way depending on whom they are talking to. Unfortunately, many boards of education like a weak superintendent. They like the way they can manipulate him to satisfy their own 'ego system'."

"Spend less time doing paper work and attending conventions and more time getting out to the public."

"Day to day, just be a sincere dedicated educator setting an example for teachers and the public as one who cares and has the courage of his convictions."

"Revamp our very strict dress code to allow girls to wear coordinated pant suits, the boys to have sideburns to the middle of the ears."

"Face the public with the question: 'What should be the top priority for your child and his future—an education, or all the other garbage they place at the top of the list?' "

"The public does not want education, but rather indoctrination. Consequently, a superintendent interested in increasing support of teachers and schools would do this by showing the public how well the schools are indoctrinating students. He might do this by releasing a survey documenting the lack of true originality in students and teachers."

"Poll the public—as you are in TEACH-POLL—on school day, calendar, curriculum cost."

"I'd give a series of coffees to small groups, 25 apiece, of important parents of the district, with the superintendent as host. Ask the guests this same question—'Suppose you were Superintendent of Schools, what would you do?' "

"If you could find evidence of students appreciating education by showing respect for teachers and public property, doing some of the school maintenance themselves, etc., I think the public would support better. The public, like children, can see through to things as they are, not as we try to picture them."

"Take the top students and the bottom students and put them in an ungraded classroom with a core of teachers trained to feed them food, education at their own speed, and encouragement."

"Get across the fact that the best thing a school can give is not entertainment or grades but a sense of worth through achievement on the part of each individual."

"Make use of national education week."

"Have a cocktail party instead of a structured PTA meeting."

And there were these additional suggestions:

"Point out to the community and students that over 50% of all teachers get out of teaching after two years or less. Then organize adult and student groups to study why teachers are quitting and what can be done about it."

"Have one teacher be the adviser for 20 to 25 students all through their high school years. Get into the homes, meet the parents socially, observe the relationship between parents and students, assess the climate of the home. Each student will have at least one teacher whom he knows and finds sympathetic, and parents will have access to information other than the sketchy bit which comes from their children. If the student has difficulty, the adviser is always involved."

"Guarantee teachers the right to discuss and become involved in the critical issues facing education and make sure this freedom of expression was not used against them in evaluation and hiring."

"Abolish the rule that if too many students flunk, the teacher flunks. It is used by students to do nothing."

"Tell teachers to quit trying to win the students over as friends but rather earn their respect with sound daily performance in class."

"Have more interaction between public and teachers. Most teachers have teachers for friends. If they go anywhere or do anything, it's always with other teachers. Most teachers are unwilling to expose themselves to any group partly because they feel intellectually superior or inferior. Many groups are reluctant to accept a teacher because they are afraid of condemnation. Interaction has to take place in order for the teacher to be accepted as a member of the human race."

"Think first of teachers and students and build from there. The entire school structure is so fragmented that one feels destroyed in a labyrinth of detail. Each administrative department, as if to justify its own existence, calls for innocuous reports or issues mandatory memoranda to frustrate the classroom teacher. The teacher who in the final analysis is the imparter of knowledge, ideas, motivation, and grades, becomes a small cog in a big machine that threatens to crush him. He is asked to flagellate himself continuously. Is he 'sensitive' to the needs of others? Is he a racist? Does he 'challenge' his students? Is he 'professional' in his attitude? Is he 'competent' in his subject matter? Is he 'popular' with the students? Does he 'cooperate' with his superiors? Does he have good 'public relations'? My God!"

"Our community is 70% retired persons. Encourage students to become friends of these elderly people and to run errands and do chores for them for free. So many retirees read about drugs and riots and assume all kids do this. If some kids really went out of their way to befriend these lonely older people, it could make them more agreeable to raising taxes for the schools."

"Require each teacher to submit a report of changes, improvements, and things he is dissatisfied with and a way to remedy them."

"Declare a moratorium on all terms such as relevant, innovate, expertise, etc. Try injecting common sense into teaching, guiding, and supervising."

"Make sure legislators get into the schools."

"Play the game with legislators using the same set of rules the other lobbyists use—money. Just buy them off."

"Sell the public on the idea that the school is the ultimate salvation of society and should be given the financial and moral backing of all citizens. If the school continues to take a back seat, the future citizens are going to be unable to cope with the problems, and we'll end up fiddling while Rome burns."

40

Finally, these teachers answered with great care and thoughtfulness and thoroughness:

"Discipline students, cut costs, cut administrative personnel, make administrators teach, get rid of PTA, no coffee breaks, visit all classes, meet with students in assemblies, stand firm behind the teachers, work, work, work, economize, keep all salaries up. (I have been an administrator.)"

"Inform the public of the crises created by the state legislature, encourage teachers to become politically involved, support teachers in the mass media, organize a 12-month school system, listen to teachers concerning curriculum changes, visit my schools—unannounced, communicate with as many teachers as possible (not just by memo), and now and then 'lower' myself to assist at a football game gate or sponsor a dance."

"Place my school on a quarter basis for a trial year. Not require daily attendance taking. Allow students to go to class on days they have required assignments. Change into more vocational courses. Put in ETV. Use more machine teaching to allow for personal progress at 'personal speed'. Expand library space and equipment for real study cubicles for research. What expensive ideas! But perhaps school would have more meaning."

"Declare support for competent teachers; fire incompetents. Publish strengths and weaknesses of schools in periodic reports to the community. Insist on more money: fight bureaucracy and local apathy by taking definite stands and refusing to give in on vital points. (And look for another job after six months!)"

41

Last, here is the most comprehensive of all the responses:

"First, we must realize the superintendent's true position. This estimable superman is designated to walk the tightrope between appeasing the school board lions and the teacher tigers over the gaping jaws of the PTA voters on the frail hope of a nontenure, often politically based job.

"To do this, some manage to enmesh the board in the net of financial trivia, relax the teachers in permissive self-management, and may even befog the PTA voters in the latest in-thing educational (?) scheme. (Change may keep one from getting in a rut but it is not necessarily good in all cases.)

"Possibly you ask too much in now expecting him to increase public understanding. This is fearsome work, indeed. Were the public to understand that many teachers were hired because they were all who were available, were the voters to know that neither school board nor teacher has the least control over state-imposed education rules, oh, dear, how distressing!

"Yet someday these and other truths will out. The buck-passing, blame-the-parents/blame-society might give way to 'let's truly work on correctives.'

"Yes, someday the first rule of school may be to 'teach them rules of conduct that they may make, once more, the great country their great grandfathers heard about, realizing that only under the discipline of ourselves are we set free to learn and are we free to live the full life God intended His creatures to live.' "

HOW THEY "VOTED"

On the first 58 items from TEACH-POLL, teachers were given the opportunity to answer one of three ways—"agree," "uncertain," or "disagree."

The proportion of "uncertain" responses was generally low, with only 4 of the 58 amounting to more than 25%. Consequently, the percentages indicated for responses to items in the following sections have been re-figured to show the division among only those teachers who took a clear-cut stand on each item, i.e., who responded either "agree" or "disagree."

Under each subject, items are listed in the order of descending agreement (which of course is different from the way they were listed in the original questionnaire).

The four items on which the percentage of "uncertain" response exceeded 25% are identified, and the results are reported both with and without the "uncertains."

One of the points of difference of TEACH-POLL was the opportunity for the respondent to explain or expand each of his answers, not only to the concluding open-end questions but also to the first 58 agree-disagree items. Some of the marginal comments are quoted (along with the way the quoted respondent voted) after some items.

The questionnaire items divided logically into eight different subjects.

Item: I would rather be an effective teacher who is not liked than an ineffective one who is liked.

Agree: 93% **Disagree:** 7%

Comment: From a teacher who **agreed:** "But I think effectiveness brings forth being liked."

Disagreed: "If you are effective, you will be liked eventually, if not at the moment."

Uncertain: "Why must it be either/or?"

[**Author's note:** This was one of those purposely frustrating questions. One of the teachers, commenting on the item, wrote "It doesn't work that way," and, of course, I agree.]

Item: As whole, my colleagues are professional, dedicated persons.

Agree: 89% **Disagree:** 11%

Comment: **Agreed:** "Without a doubt, the most well-qualified, self-sacrificing people I've ever met. If they weren't they'd be in jobs that are better paid, more open for advancement, and more prestigious."

Disagreed: "Aw, come on. Dedicated to busy work, trivia, getting more $$, etc."

Item: "Accountability" for teachers is a good thing.

Agree: 84% **Disagree:** 16%

Comment: **Agreed:** "But why? I've been accountable to my students ever since I began teaching."
Disagreed: "What about parents, police, social workers, doctors, lawyers, etc.? Are they accountable for their failures?" "Only if administration is included."

Item: Teaching is getting harder all the time.

Agree: 79% **Disagree:** 21%

Comment: **Agreed:** "Students cannot read." "Too much clerical work." "But more exciting." "More frustrating."
Disagreed: "I find competition much easier than when I started teaching. Today, fellow teachers are less dedicated."

Item: My job calls on me to be more of a parent, counselor, policeman, and psychiatrist than teacher.

Agree: 59% **Disagree:** 41%

Comment: **Agreed:** "Babysitting better describes our function."
Disagreed: "These are all part of being a teacher."

Item: Seeing students outside of school hours is something I consider a regular part of my job.

Agree: 58% **Disagree:** 42%

Comment: **Agreed:** "If students come to my home, I welcome them."
Disagreed: "Not as part of my job but as a human."
Uncertain: "I thought it would be frowned upon by the administration."

Item: Our school has an effective guidance program.

Agree: 53% **Disagree:** 47%

Comment: **Disagreed:** "Too burdened with clerical and administrative duties." "Too busy with discipline and attendance." "I could do better, without a single guidance class to my name. It's absurd. Counseling means caring about students and their problems. Our small school has one counselor, lazy and inefficient. The students are being shortchanged."

Item: I have as much to say about the curriculum in my school as I would like.

Agree: 46% **Disagree:** 54%

Comment: **Agreed:** "A reasonable amount; we can't have it all our way all the time." "However, to have it implemented is another thing."

Item: There is enough time provided for me to have meaningful meetings with parents.

Agree: 39% **Disagree:** 61%

Comment: **Agreed:** "But they don't come." "Haven't had a parent in a year." "Time is not the problem for me—it is the parents who lack the time."
Disagreed: "Many times parents work and cannot come to school during school hours, but union opposes meeting them one night a semester."

Item: I have sufficient time and opportunity to talk with and learn from other faculty.

Agree: 36% **Disagree:** 64%

Item: Most schools do not tolerate individual initiative and creativity on the part of most teachers.

Agree: 33% **Disagree:** 67%

Comment: **Agreed:** "They say they do but they don't really back up." "It is usually allowed on a token and superficial basis."

Disagreed: "Ours encourages it." "The community does not, however. This is where the criticism comes from."

Item: Teaching the subject matter is more important than getting to know my students.

Agree: 16% **Disagree:** 84%

Comment: **Agreed:** "We're not social workers." "I teach typing and bookkeeping." "There are too many students to get to know."

Disagreed: "You must get them to identify with you or they won't listen." "They are inseparable." "People who work together get to know each other—and teaching is working together."

[**Author's note:** This was another of the purposely frustrating items, and there were many teachers who commented "I believe in both."]

Item: Teaching is more of an intellectual strain than an emotional one.

Agree: 13% **Disagree:** 87%

Comment: **Disagreed:** "No strain at all—wish it were more of an intellectual strain." "I think it's more physical than anything else, and I am young and healthy."

On Teachers as Citizens

Item: It is all right for teachers to run for local political office.

Agree: 91% **Disagree:** 9%

Comment: **Agreed:** "As long as they fulfill their teaching obligation." "But not in the town where they teach—conflict of interest." "But I don't see how a *real* teacher would have time."

Disagreed: "A good teacher will not have the time or energy."

Item: It is all right for teachers to go on strike.

Agree: 58% **Disagree:** 42%

Comment: **Agreed:** "As a last resort." "Only when school board is unrealistic and stubborn." "The way things are today, how else can we be heard?"

Disagreed: "I disapprove of any strike." "The ones most hurt are students." "We now have other means."

Item: Teachers should not take part in political demonstrations.

Agree: 25% **Disagree:** 75%

Comment: **Agreed:** "I think there are always more effective means than demonstrations."

Disagreed: "Not violent ones or strikes, though."

Item: As professionals, teachers should not engage in collective bargaining.

Agree: 15% **Disagree:** 85%

Comment: **Agreed:** "Professionals tell, they do not bargain."

Disagreed: "I do not prefer it this way, but it seems this is becoming the only way." "Necessary evil." "We don't set hours, wages, or who will instruct so we're not professionals."

Item: Today's students know more than their parents did in the same grade.

Agree: 85% **Disagree:** 15%

Comment: **Agreed:** "But perhaps don't have the common sense." "Birds and bees, yes." "More facts, yes; how to deal with facts intellectually, no."

Disagreed: "Not in mathematics." "They're only more verbal." "More of the wrong things." "They only think so."

Item: Schools and teachers do a better job for minority students today than when I started teaching.

Agree: 84% **Disagree:** 16%

Comment: **Agreed:** "Which isn't saying much." "There is still a tremendous amount to do." "But the progress is too slow."

Disagreed: "Are you kidding? No progress here for a long time." "Minorities don't take advantage of what is available."

[**Author's note:** This is one of the four highest "uncertain" response items. With the "uncertains" included, the figures were: agree—62%, uncertain—26%, disagree—12%.]

Item: Students do not have as positive an attitude toward education today as they had in the past.

Agree: 77% **Disagree:** 23%

Comment: **Agreed:** "Why should they?" "Did they ever have?" "This is justified."
Disagreed: "They have a more critical attitude, which I consider as positive." "They are less accepting of the way education is handled and more demanding that it fit pupil needs."

Item: Schools and teachers do a better job for all students today than when I started teaching.

Agree: 62% **Disagree:** 38%

Comment: **Agreed:** "Our biggest academic problem." "They are familiar with more material, but have not mastered basics as well." "They do not know how to use their time effectively." "But they are more sophisticated in the ways of the world."

Item: Most of the time our school treats students too permissively.

Agree: 58% **Disagree:** 42%

Comment: **Agreed:** "Because of parents and courts."

Item: Students should have more "say" in the decision-making process of schools than they presently have.

Agree: 34% **Disagree:** 66%

Comment: **Agreed:** "Definitely, and not tokenism, either." "Less discipline would be necessary if students had a voice in school decisions." "Within limits. Students are not equipped to hire, fire, etc." "I am advocating an 18-year-old student be elected to the school board."
Disagreed: "They have too much now." "Why—the blind leading the blind?" "When given the opportunity they are only critical rather than suggestive."

Item: Students are justified in demonstrating when their demands are not considered.

Agree: 31% **Disagree:** 69%

Comment: **Agreed:** "If done in a mature manner." "Peaceably only." "If they are constructive and don't infringe on anyone else's rights."

Disagreed: "The word 'demands' turns me off." "If they would make reasonable 'requests' rather than 'demands,' they would get farther." "Students should not be in a position to demand."

Item: Our school worries too much about student appearance.

Agree: 19% **Disagree:** 81%

Comment: **Disagreed:** "They don't worry." "We should worry more about it." "Ours have gone to pot." "Ours come looking like tramps."

Item: Our school worries too much about student behavior.

Agree: 11% **Disagree:** 89%

Comment: **Disagreed:** "Can't worry too much." "It doesn't concern itself." "It fails to recognize students with problems unless they are manifested by bad behavior."

Item: Most of the time our school treats students too strictly.

Agree: 7% **Disagree:** 93%

Comment: **Disagreed:** "Students appreciate firm rules." "Children must learn discipline somewhere."

On the Parents of Our Students

Item: Parents pressure their children too much to go to college.

Agree: 85% **Disagree:** 15%

Comment: **Agreed:** "Yes, yes, yes."

Item: The main thing many parents want today is for the schools to be responsible for the behavior of their children.

Agree: 82% **Disagree:** 18%

Comment: **Agreed:** "It's easier to pass the responsibility to someone else." "They want the teachers to do the dirty work." "And this is wrong."

Item: Most parents don't try to understand what it is that a high school teacher does.

Agree: 80% **Disagree:** 20%

Comment: **Agreed:** "They couldn't, just as I don't know what it takes to be a doctor."

Item: Most parents don't try to understand what is going on in schools these days.

Agree: 76% **Disagree:** 24%

Item: Parents pressure their children too much to earn high grades in high school.

Agree: 63% **Disagree:** 37%

Comment: **Agreed:** "That's the main reason for cheating." "Many parents don't understand the "C" as an average grade. A "C" is bad to them."

Item: Parents of our students support the school program well.

Agree: 48% **Disagree:** 52%

Comment: **Agreed:** "Athletics and the band, maybe." "Blind acceptance." "As long as their children receive permissive treatment."

Disagreed: "Thought they did but the bond issue failed." "They do in an unintelligent way, blanket approval."

Item: The parents of my students are "there" when the kids need them.

Agree: 22% **Disagree:** 78%

Comment: **Agreed:** "With money, but not philosophy."

Disagreed: "Unfortunately, about 80% are not available for help."

[**Author's note:** This is one of the four highest "uncertain" response items. With the "uncertains" included, the figures were: agree—14%, uncertain—36%, disagree—50%.]

The Public and Our Schools

Item: There is more negative criticism of schools and teachers today than there used to be.

Agree: 87% **Disagree:** 13%

Comment: **Agreed:** "Not necessarily a bad thing." "People are more critical in their thinking, which is good." "This is a time of criticism." "But not enough."

Item: In spite of what people say, the public school system of today is quite good.

Agree: 83% **Disagree:** 17%

Comment: **Agreed:** "The sheer size of the job is astounding. Any degree of success is phenomenal." "But not as good as it was before the court takeover."

Disagreed: "We are not meeting individual needs." "Unless you consider what it has to work with." "Not when we are turning out 50% or more of our students, especially in predominately black schools, with insufficient reading, writing, and arithmetic skills, and this after 13 years of formal education."

Item: The real reason many people are unhappy with schools today is the cost.

Agree: 52% **Disagree:** 48%

Comment: **Agreed:** "Especially administrative costs." "And not getting their dollar's worth." "There is no reason schools couldn't be run more efficiently."

Disagreed: "I believe they are unhappy with the type of citizen that graduates." "No, they're unhappy with results."

Item: Nonparent taxpayers have too much "say" about schools.

Agree: 37% **Disagree:** 63%

Comment: **Disagreed:** "Their money is just as green." "Not enough say." "As long as schools are supported by the property tax, they certainly should have a say." "Who pays the piper, calls the tune."

[**Author's note:** This is one of the four highest "uncertain" response items. With the "uncertains" included, the figures were: agree–24%, uncertain–35%, disagree–41%.]

Item: The public understands teachers and schools better today than in the past.

Agree: 28% **Disagree:** 72%

Comment: **Disagreed:** "Problems are more complex now." "There is too little communication for understanding to exist."

How the Schools Should Be Run

Item: Drug education, when taught by competent persons, should be a required part of today's curriculum.

Agree: 89% **Disagree:** 11%

Comment: **Agreed:** "But I haven't seen any competent persons at the high school level yet." "Start in the fourth grade." "But not as a separate course." "If curriculum is devised with students." "Before it is too late."

Disagreed: "There are too many required subjects now." "Is there a person who does not know they are harmful?"

Item: Sex education when taught by competent persons also should be required.

Agree: 85% **Disagree:** 15%

Comment: **Agreed:** "Not PE teachers." "No one else is helping them." "There are too many emotionally unstable persons teaching sex education." "Taught as a clinical subject, boys and girls segregated."

Disagreed: "Parents should make the decision." "Offered, yes; required, no."

Item: Automatic promotion of students should be abolished.

Agree: 84% **Disagree:** 16%

Comment: **Agreed:** "Perpetuates getting something for nothing."
Disagreed: "If student is doing his best, he should progress."

Item: Private and parochial schools should not be given public funds.

Agree: 63% **Disagree:** 37%

Comment: **Agreed:** "But parents should be allowed credit on taxes."
Disagreed: "Why not, the parents pay taxes." "On the contrary, they should be supported." "Monopolies are always to be suspected, public schools need competition." "Our goal as a society should be to educate our young, regardless of where they go to school."

Item: There should be more courses, content, and experience in high school relevant to the contribution of minority groups to society.

Agree: 62% **Disagree:** 38%

Comment: **Agreed:** "Should be integrated into regular courses, not set aside as special 'Negro history,' etc." "We have a token minority lit class, but that's not going far enough." "If they are properly prepared and not just instituted to say we have them."
Disagreed: "Maybe, but acquiring necessary learning and skills is more important." "I'm sick and tired of relevancy, it's an excuse."

Item: Schools should operate on a 12-month basis.

Agree: 46% **Disagree:** 54%

Comment:

Agreed: "With air conditioning." "It would be economically desirable but I wouldn't want to teach 12 months." "But all should have a three-month vacation as now—rotate groups." "With the students and their parents deciding when they can attend school, when they can take vacations, travel, etc."

Disagreed: "Teachers would all go crazy." "We have a hard enough time keeping them in, in the spring, anyway." "I need that two-month rest to refresh for the new year."

Item: Corporal punishment should be a part of school discipline.

Agree: 42% **Disagree:** 58%

Comment:

Agreed: "For selected serious offenses only." "In extreme cases and by the principal." "There are a very few students who respect and fear no other form of punishment." "I don't believe in child beating but a paddle should be allowed if nothing else works."

Uncertain: "I used to disagree, but I'm beginning to wonder about those brats who were raised permissively."

Item: The tenure system should be abolished for high school teachers.

Agree: 32% **Disagree:** 68%

Comment:

Agreed: "There should be a way to get rid of poor teachers." "The retirement age should be lowered." "If a teacher is too poor to keep his job on his own merits, he shouldn't be teaching." "Some teachers get tenure and retire mentally." "Why just high school, why not college and elementary school, too?" "If they have a union, tenure is no longer necessary."

Disagreed: "Administration and board cannot be trusted." "Some poor teachers are tolerated under tenure, but many good teachers are protected by it." "If tenure were abolished, I feel quite sure our board would let teachers at the top of the pay scale go and hire inexperienced teachers for less money." "But tenure should start later, say after 5 to 10 years." "A political takeover would follow." "Having taught under nontenure, I know how teachers become pawns."

Item: Class attendance should not be compulsory for high school students.

Agree: 30% **Disagree:** 70%

Comment: **Agreed:** "Let them flunk if they wish." "Good students would be there, anyway."

Item: All grades and tests in public schools should be abolished.

Agree 9% **Disagree:** 91%

Comment: **Agreed:** "Grades demoralize as much as motivate." "It would be nice but not possible."

Disagreed: "Tests are part of life." "This is unrealistic in preparing students for a highly graded life." "Worst thing that could happen."

On Teacher Education

Item: Interpersonal relationship training should be a required course in teacher training.

Agree: 90% **Disagree:** 10%

Comment: **Agreed:** "Amen " "But how do you teach that?" "Preferably after one year of teaching."

Disagreed: "Some could never learn it." "A lot of brainwashing hoopla."

Item: There should be better screening of students admitted to teacher education programs in college.

Agree: 88% **Disagree:** 12%

Comment: **Agreed:** "But according to more than grades." "Students do not always make the best teachers." "Too many teach as an interim method to earn money or because not accepted for something else." "Yes, indeed, screen out the illiterates." "That probably would have left me out. I don't think I'm a bad teacher but education courses did little for me."

Disagreed: "Some of the best teachers don't do well in education college programs." "With the nuts running the teacher education programs, no telling who they would screen out."

Item: In teacher education programs, the major emphasis should be on academic subjects rather than "how to teach" courses.

Agree: 45% **Disagree:** 55%

Comment: **Agreed:** "Instead of those courses, student teaching should be expanded." "I was fortunate. I learned the 'how' from my students." "My 'how to teach' courses rarely taught how to teach."

Disagreed: "A teacher needs to know both."

Looking Forward (and Backward)

Item: All things considered, the conditions under which I teach are reasonably good.

Agree: 90% **Disagree:** 10%

Comment: **Disagreed:** "The administration is marvelous but the school plant is ghastly." "There is too much dissension. A total negative view."

Item: I would like to spend the rest of my working career in teaching.

Agree: 78% **Disagree:** 22%

Comment:

Agreed: "After investing close to $50,000 in educational training, I cannot afford to leave teaching."

Disagreed: "I'd like to do something else every two or three years for a fresh perspective."

Item: I would like to spend the rest of my teaching career in my present school.

Agree: 66% **Disagree:** 34%

Comment:

Agreed: "This is a good school and a rarity." "I would like periodically to teach in other localities and then return." "If it remains calm."

[**Author's note:** This was one of the four highest "uncertain" response items. With the "uncertains" included, the figures were: agree—47%, uncertain—29%, disagree—24%.]

Item: All things considered, I am being paid reasonably well for my teaching.

Agree: 59% **Disagree:** 41%

Comment:

Agreed: "As long as salaries continue to increase faster than cost of living." "Am not working for the money but to try to accomplish something. It's creative." "It's the deductions that hurt." "Compared to what my parents earned, but not compared to a factory worker, brewery worker, etc."

Disagreed: "No teacher is paid correctly. The bad ones are greatly overpaid and good ones vastly underpaid." "I find it difficult to support my family without my wife working."

Item: If I had it to do over again, I'd not go into teaching.

Agree: 18% **Disagree:** 82%

Comment:

Agreed: "I did not know how stifled teachers were. You must be a nonthinking robot to cope with narrow-minded administrators."

Disagreed: "Love the job." "Love it—and the kids." "I might major in a subject that doesn't require so much paper-correcting."

What All This Adds up to

WHAT THEY TOLD US

When you add up all the opinions and attitudes and strong feelings of the teachers, what do they say?

You get the impression that here is a mixed bag. On the one side, some TEACH-POLL respondents can be described only as selfish, self-pitying, apparently indolent. They want respect because they think their position deserves it, not because their performance merits it.

On the other side, what a contrast! There you think of words like "dedicated," and "selfless," and "hard-working," and "truly concerned about others," particularly students.

Not much different from any other widely representative group of adults—save for one thing.

These are the men and women to whom we entrust the making of our youngsters, the welfare of our sons and daughters as they grow and (let's hope) mature to "almost-adulthood."

In what the teachers report, you also see other mixed bags. Best parents, worst parents. Beloved principals, despised principals. Brilliant superintendents, stupid superintendents. Delightful students, demoniacal students. Unbelievable school board members, narrow self-seeking legislators, ungenerous taxpayers, undistinguished other teachers.

All of this would be almost understandably "ho hum" were it not for that jabbing realization that won't go away, the knowledge that the men and women who here write are (as one of the teachers said) more of an influence on our teen-agers than are those teen-agers' mothers and fathers.

That makes *Teachers Tell It* a truly "telling" documentary.

- It tells us more about teachers, for instance, than any other publication in print.
- It tells us they have much to say.
- It tells us we ought to listen to them more, and more willingly.
- It tells us that unless we listen better and more often to teachers, we aren't going to learn a great deal we ought to know about what goes on in our schools and with our children.

* * *

Those who responded so frankly and feelingly to TEACH-POLL help us draw some conclusions about teachers, about parents, and about school management officials (principals, superintendents, school board members).

1. Most respondents made it clear they despise those of their colleagues who do not pull their weight, who are the "8-to-3-short-cutters." Most want to be held accountable. Most want to do a good job, despite what they consider increasing obstacles.

2. Most of these teachers reflect a genuine concern for students. This comes through again and again. It is the student who causes the teacher the trouble and emotional strain, but it also is the student who makes possible the joy and thrill of accomplishment and the satisfactions and the compensations that go far beyond any paycheck.

3. More and more, these teachers want their rights as citizens, and not second-class rights, either. There were hundreds of reports of special disadvantages and humiliations thrust upon many teachers in many communities—just because they are teachers. One TEACH-POLL just cannot and will not take the place of full-blown day-by-day status that says it is just as OK for teachers to have feelings and personal liberties and opportunities for self-expression as it is for any other important group in our society to expect and enjoy those same markers of respect.

4. Those younger teachers who responded—the under-30s—differ sharply from older teachers, the over-45s, in many respects. This is true in the responses to nearly half of the 58 agree-disagree questions, and these five most divergent replies set the pattern:

- Item: "Teachers ought not take part in political demonstrations." Of the under-30s, only 16% agreed, but of the over-45s, 36% agreed.

- Item: "The tenure system should be abolished for high school teachers." Under-30s: 48% agreed. Over-45s: only 23% agreed.

- Item: "Most of the time our school treats students too strictly." Under-30s: 14% agreed. Over-45s: only 4% agreed.

- Item: "Students are justified in demonstrating when their demands are not considered." Under-30s: 49% agreed. Over-45s: only 20% agreed.

- Item: "Our school worries too much about student appearance." Under-30s: 26% agreed. Over-45s: only 13% agreed.

Generally, the younger the teacher, the more "liberal" the attitude.

Are the differences merely a reflection of age and experience? When today's over-45s were themselves under-30, were they, too, more "liberal" and has their conservativeness increased merely as their age advanced? Or is today's under-30 teacher a truly different kind reflecting all the changes in society?

The answers are not to be found in this study, because we were investigating other subjects. But the questions won't just go away, and perhaps some future TEACH-POLL can tell us.

5. Despite all the things wrong with teaching, TEACH-POLLers think there are even more things right with it.

By and large, they report that teacher satisfactions are great. For example:

- For every 8 who do not agree they are paid "reasonably well," there are 11 who feel they are.

- If they had to do it over again, only 4 would not go into teaching for every 18 who would.

- For every 3 who do not want to spend the rest of their working careers in teaching, there are 10 who do.

- And for every 2 who do not agree that the conditions under which they teach are "reasonably good," there are 17 who do agree those conditions are reasonably good.

For all the complaining (which, of course, we generated by asking the questions we did), the "pull" of teaching remains and is very strong.

ABOUT PARENTS

Somewhere along the line, someone has sold (and we as gullible parents have bought) the idea that one way to help our kids grow up and become independent is to abandon them.

Oh, yes, we provide the bread—both for the table and for the wallet. We make a pass at setting some kinds of standards ("get the car back in by midnight"). In little spurts, we ask how school is going and what are you going to take next year? If our oldest suddenly goes off on some kind of save-the-environment or antiwar kick, we listen a little (but sputter more). Most of the time, our thoughts are far, far away.

It seems perfectly clear, both from these TEACH-POLL results and from what teen-agers had to say for themselves in the earlier YOUTHPOLL,[1] that we would not be restricting our youngsters' freedom one whit were we to:

a. Stick by them through their high school years.
b. Know what subjects they take in school, and what concepts and ideas those subjects include.
c. Know their teachers. Know them because we have had a serious discussion with each. Know them because we've asked for their thoughts on teaching (not because we pounded the desk and told them how to teach).
d. Know how well our students are doing, and how this jibes with their indicated ability. Not expect them to get grades beyond their reach, but by all means expect them to give school enough priority so they literally do the best they can.
e. Have some idea where all this is taking our sons and daughters, instead of letting things slide so long that either inertia or momentum takes over to plan their lives.
f. Help those wonderful young people understand that we continue to love them, and that we do care, and that we aren't about to cut them loose from that loving and that caring just because we also want them to know how to stand on their own feet.

There's not a thing in the principles of learning too complicated for mothers and fathers to understand—and that means all mothers and fathers. Get the principal to describe them for you. Better still, ask one of those bright, just-out-of-college youngsters who just joined the faculty. That young teacher will not yet have decided that you cannot help teen-agers learn—because you can, as a great many sparklingly good teachers, both old and young, prove every day.

And so this conclusion:

6. Parents are more important to their teen-agers than they have let themselves think they are. Parents should not abandon their high-school-age youngsters. There never is a time, especially during high school, when mothers and fathers should stop loving and caring, and every day proving to their children that they do.

ABOUT SCHOOL OFFICIALS

This section for principals and superintendents and school board members has a very simple theme: If you want to manage your school and your system better, listen to teachers more. They are more important and have more to offer than generally you credit them.

---

[1] As reported in *When You Listen, This Is What You Can Hear,* by Gordon A. Sabine. Published earlier in 1971 by The American College Testing Program, P.O. Box 168, Iowa City, Iowa 52240. $3.00.

If when you read the TEACH-POLL comments, you are disturbed about what is said about you, that's good. You should be. Based on what these teachers have written, you have not played your role well and you have not made yourself understood well.

If you want to improve this unhappy and unproductive situation, you can do several things:

7. Run your own TEACH-POLL. Ask the tough questions, not wishy-washy generalizations. Find out how you are perceived by teachers. Find out how your policies can or cannot be put into practice on the firing line. Ask your teachers how to improve your own local situation.

8. If costs concern you, ask teachers how to save money without hurting students or teaching. (Business gets good money-saving ideas by offering cash awards for workable suggestions; why not try the same thing?)

9. Do teachers sit with you during your management meetings, not to vote but with the power to speak and react? This you could do without eroding your chain-of-command relationship. True, the teachers from time to time might ask "Why?" and you might have to come up with some explanations, but that's all to the good for both sides.

10. Do your school board members have regular meetings just for teachers, and for all teachers in your system, so you may explain actions taken or contemplated, and so individual teachers may question and suggest? That would be sort of a "teachers town meeting," and properly conducted (i.e., with great openness on both sides), would help you more than it would help them. (In the end, of course, it would help students most of all.)

11. In TEACH-POLL, many teachers propose expulsion or other harsh reaction to disruptive students. They correctly point out that those few should not prevent others from learning. Then after blaming the kids, they flatly give up on them.

But expulsion won't solve the basic problem. Isn't there someone on your faculty who can write out the names of 15 or 20 of the worst actors in school, and take this list to the principal and say "Why don't you let me work with these rowdies and see whether some good old-fashioned attention and love and caring can make a difference?"

(As this is written, I have the feeling that what I am suggesting is that old one about "as a last resort, read the directions." For this suggestion represents only what every teacher and every school should have been applying all along—a differentiated response that recognizes individual problems, and that also recognizes that each of us, adult or youngster, needs someone to love him and to let him know. Nevertheless, if all else *has* failed, it might be worth a try.)

12. Teachers make many suggestions for improving and increasing public support of schools in the superintendent-for-a-year section. Some offer little promise, but some are superb. The principal or superintendent or school board member who cannot find in all those ideas a dozen, or a half-dozen (or at least two or three) that would make a significant contribution to his own local situation must have a remarkable organization, indeed.

The teacher who wrote in TEACH-POLL that a school is only as good as its teachers—not as its principal, or its superintendent, or its school board—is right, you know.

* * *

One more for school management officials:

13. If you want to improve your public relations and win better understanding and support, forego and forget the superficial "goodies" and "quickies" that are offered as instant benefits.

There is one, and only one, road to continued support, to sure results, guaranteed as effective tomorrow as yesterday.

That is having a good product.

As the teachers point out, the facade of an all-is-well "open house" best-bib-and-tucker staged presentation of what is going on in the schools does not work either well or permanently. Your public sees through it, and eventually will know something is wrong.

A good product. In this case, good learning opportunities for students and good learning by students. That is what will stop a great deal of criticism in its tracks. That is what builds support. That is what fills the reservoir of goodwill. That is what will come back to praise you, not plague you.

And no get-rich-quick scheme can replace it for long.

* * *

Finally:

14. *Teachers Tell It* provides a valuable counseling and guidance tool for both high school and college students.

In a decade of increasing oversupply of teachers and a shortage of teacher vacancies, it is important for any student tentatively interested in teaching to understand as much as possible about the field.

Being able to read *Teachers Tell It* before making a final decision will help. It will confirm the interest of some but correctly scare off the weak-hearted and only casually motivated.

Teachers Tell It can be a valuable reference item in any high school guidance office. It also well could be an advanced-reading assignment which college and university admissions officials could require of students applying to major in education programs.

Participating Schools

Alabama—Clay County High School, Ashland; Mountain Brook High School. Alaska—West Anchorage High School. Arizona—Mohave High School, Bullhead City; Camelback and Cortez High Schools, Phoenix. Arkansas—Eudora High School; Little Rock Central High School. California—University High School, Los Angeles.

Colorado—Grand Junction High School. Connecticut—St. Bernard Girls High School, New London. Delaware—Seaford High School; Brandywine High School, Wilmington. District of Columbia—Archbishop Carroll High School. Florida—Parker High School, Jacksonville; Key West High School. Georgia—Gordon Military High School, Barnesville.

Hawaii—St. Joseph High School, Hilo. Idaho—Borah High School, Boise; Nampa Senior High School. Illinois—Quincy Senior High School. Indiana—Lincoln High School, Vincennes. Iowa—Roosevelt High School, Des Moines; Valley High School, West Des Moines. Kansas—Derby Senior High School; Lawrence High School.

Kentucky—St. Xavier High School, Louisville. Louisiana—Kennedy Senior High School, New Orleans; Sulphur High School. Maine—South Portland High School. Maryland—Allegany High School, Cumberland. Massachusetts—Pittsfield High School. Michigan—Cody and McKenzie High Schools, Detroit.

Minnesota—Edina High School; Central High School, Minneapolis. Mississippi—Corinth High School; Murrah High School, Jackson. Missouri—Bishop DuBourg High School, St. Louis. Montana—Billings West High School; Whitefish Senior High School. Nebraska—Papillion High School. Nevada—Valley High School, Las Vegas; Lowry High School, Winnemucca.

New Jersey—Atlantic City High School; South Plainfield High School. New Mexico—Sandia High School, Albuquerque; Tucumcari High School. New York—Hamburg Central High School. North Carolina—Northeastern High School, Elizabeth City; Ashbrook High School, Gastonia. North Dakota—North High School, Fargo; West Fargo High School.

Ohio—Wickliffe High School. Oklahoma—Miami High School; Putnam City High School, Oklahoma City. Oregon—North Eugene High School, Eugene; Benson Polytechnic High School, Portland. Pennsylvania—Ancilla Domini Academy, Philadelphia; Allegheny Comprehensive High School, Pittsburgh. Rhode Island—Mount Pleasant High School, Providence; Westerly High School.

South Carolina—Flora High School, Columbia. South Dakota—Belle Fourche High School; Lincoln Senior High School, Sioux Falls. Tennessee—Union City High School. Texas—Cy-Fair High School, Houston; Rayburn High School, Pasadena. Utah—Bountiful High School; Skyline High School, Salt Lake City. Vermont—Burlington High School. Virginia—Glass High School, Lynchburg.

Washington—Long High School, Longview; Roosevelt High School, Seattle; Walla Walla High School. West Virginia—Huntington High School; Morgantown High School. Wisconsin—New Berlin High School. Wyoming—Cheyenne Central High School; Cody High School.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The first senior postdoctoral fellowship in the new ACT Research Institute went to a man who has spent 20 of the past 29 years in university administration. Gordon A. Sabine earned the BA and MA from the University of Wisconsin, and the PhD from the University of Minnesota. He worked on daily newspapers, wrote for magazines, and was a journalism professor before becoming dean of the School of Journalism of the University of Oregon in 1950. In 1955, he became the first dean of the new College of Communication Arts at Michigan State University, and in 1960, became vice president for special projects at Michigan State. He was an ACT Fellow in 1970-71. During the 1971-72 academic year, Sabine will be on a year-long leave of absence from his position as professor of Communication at Michigan State in order to serve as special assistant to the president of Illinois State University.